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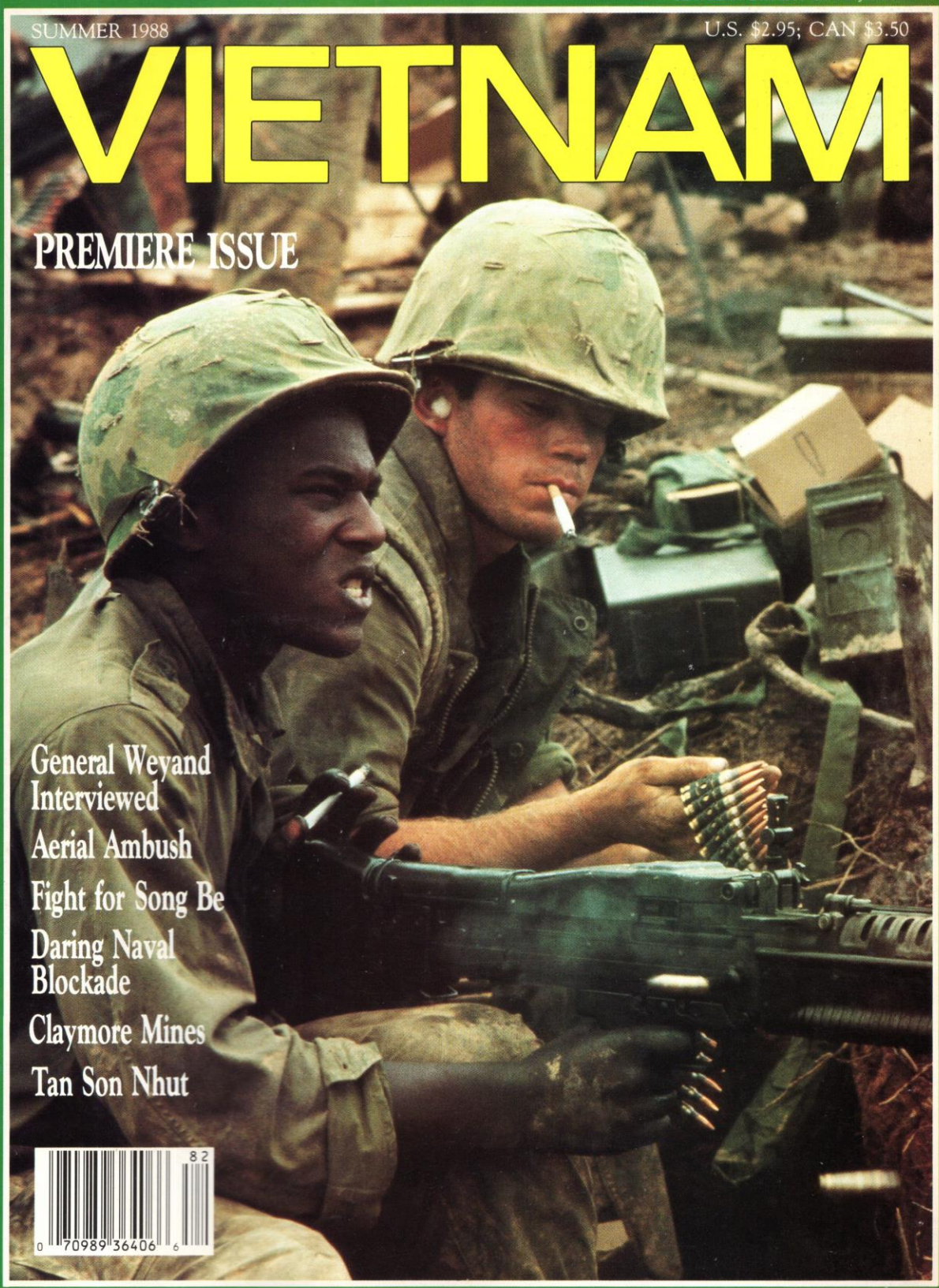
VIETNAM

PREMIERE ISSUE



General Weyand Interviewed

Aerial Ambush

Fight for Song Be

Daring Naval Blockade

Claymore Mines

Tan Son Nhut

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—Theodore Roosevelt

Vietnam...It was far away. It was hot. It was bloody. It was Vietnam. The dirtiest war in America's history. A war fought against an almost unseen enemy. Brutal to both mind and spirit. There were no flags waving, no bands playing to welcome you and none when you came home.

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The First Personalized Vietnam Tour Of Duty Service Plaque

After years of in-depth research into Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force records and archives, we've identified all of the major combat and support units assigned to the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV). And, we've created a detailed, historically accurate Order of Battle map depicting their assignments, responsibilities, and important actions against the enemy in a unique and graphic format.

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If you served in Vietnam anytime between 1963 and 1975, we have the combat history of your unit, and can create an authentic and personalized history of your tour of duty. A personal tribute to those who paid their dues and became winners in the eyes of history.

CIA Briefing Map Identifies Your Unit

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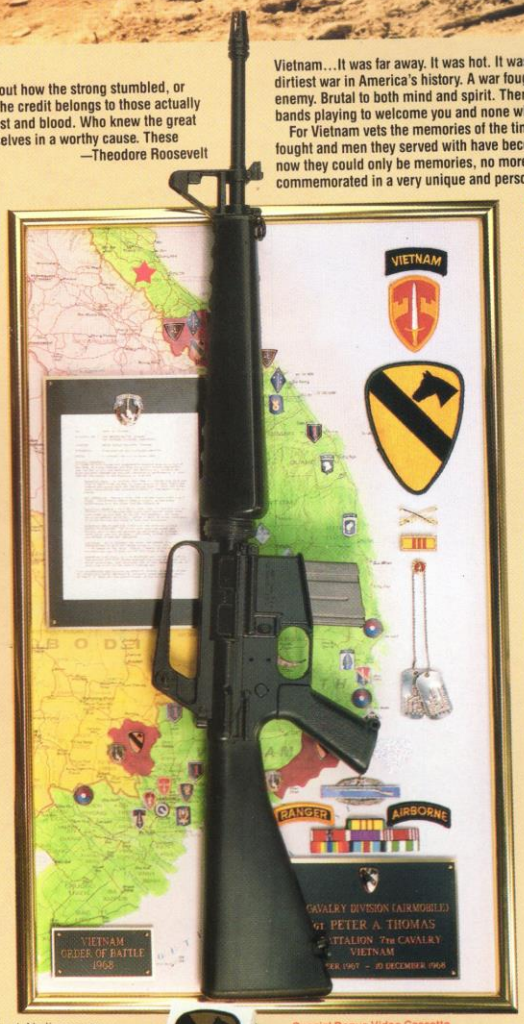

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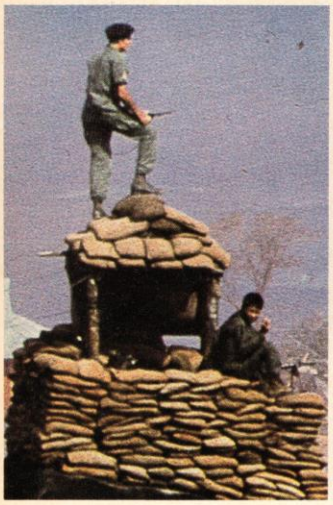

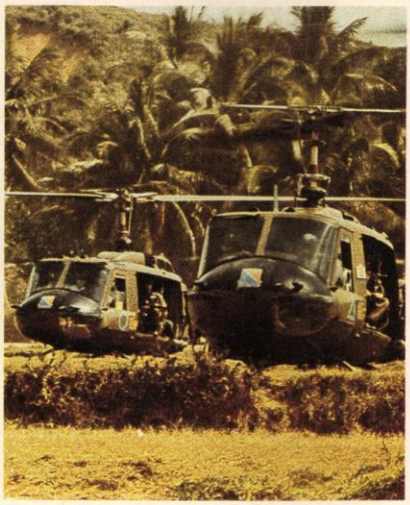

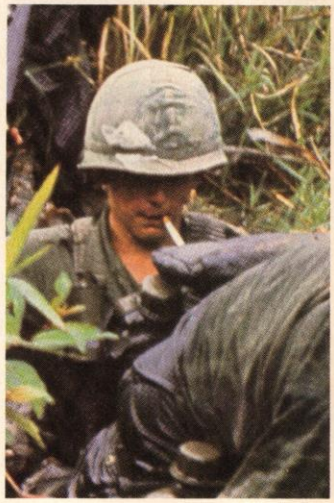

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Blazing firefights punctuated routine boredom for the sailors, aircrews and Coast Guardsmen of Operation Market Time—the blockade of South Vietnam's coast from supply by the North.

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The MiGs popping through the overcast expected to meet heavily burdened F-105 "Thuds," but they instead found a flock of F-4 Phantoms loaded for bear.

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The newly arrived Green Berets didn't like the looks of the American compound at Song Be, a "safe" provincial capital. Before they could dig in properly, however, the Viet Cong struck...

COVER: The intensity of ground combat is reflected on the faces of these men on a perimeter post. ABOVE LEFT: Intricate fortifications like this became mightmarish confusion when infiltrated or overrun by Viet Cong, as happened when they attacked the MACV camp at Song Be, where the hand-to-hand fighting was as fierce as any ever encountered by U.S. forces (story, Page 4). CENTER: These UH-1D transports, were the best-known image of Vietnam. ABOVE RIGHT: Troops of the 25th Infantry Division slog homeward. General Fred C. Weyand says these men were as fine as any he ever served with—including World War II and the Korean conflict (story, Page 20).

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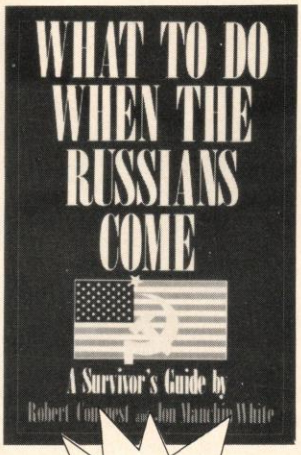
Strange advice from the authors:

BURN THIS BOOK

But that's only the beginning, if the peaceniks have their way and Russia ever does take over. The alternative might be to spend the rest of your days up near the Arctic Circle.

Say, what's going on here? Has the Conservative Book Club suddenly started offering kooky books?

Not on your life — and we use those words advisedly. This one is by Robert Conquest, who probably knows as much about the Soviets as any Westerner alive today. Conquest, now a senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution, wrote the classic study of Stalin's reign of murder, *The Great Terror*. Co-author Jon Manchip White is the Lindsay Young Professor of English at the University of Tennessee. So you'll be reading a serious book about a grim possibility. This isn't a *1984*-style fantasy. *This book is based entirely upon what hundreds of millions have suffered when the Communists took over — but with ingenious variations added especially for America.*



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The Vietnam War was one of those "riddles wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."

To most Americans, the Vietnam war fits almost perfectly Winston Churchill's famous description of the Soviet Union quoted above. Thirty-eight years after American involvement in Vietnam began, fifteen years after the withdrawal of all U.S. military forces there, and thirteen years after the fall of Saigon, the war there truly remains an enigma—"a perplexing, baffling or seemingly inexplicable matter."

Perplexing and baffling it may well be, but we do not believe that it is enexplicable. The goal we here at *Vietnam* magazine have set for ourselves is to find the key to unlock that enigma. And we think it can be found in an exploration of the complexities that made the Vietnam war unique.

Twin 30-caliber machine guns of a Navy UH1-B helicopter gunship provide fire support for river patrol boats in the Mekong Delta during Operation Market Time.

To a remarkable degree the Vietnam war was time and space dependent. The "truth" of an American Army advisor in the Mekong Delta in 1958 was not the "truth" of a Marine rifleman on the DMZ in 1968. And neither of these "truths" were that of the river rats of the brown-water Navy, the pilots dodging SAMs in the skies over Hanoi, or of the nurses struggling to save lives in an Evacuation Hospital. There are literally millions of "truths" about the Vietnam war, for over three million American soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines and Coast Guardsmen have served in the Southeast Asia theater from 1964 to 1975 alone—two million five hundred and ninety four thousand within Vietnam itself. Each of these truths form a piece of the Vietnam puzzle.

While it is not our intent to solve that puzzle—only you, the reader, can do that—we do intend to lay out the key pieces so that a solution is possible. Each issue of the magazine will feature an in-depth interview with someone who was there who can provide insights into what the war was all about. In this issue, for example, we talked to General Fred C. Weyand, the last American commander in Vietnam, who compares the fighting abilities of American servicemen in Vietnam with those he served with in World War II and Korea and talks about his role in the Tet Offensive of 1968.

Another regular feature will be a look at the arsenal of the war. This issue examines Claymore mines, and subsequent issues will look at such things as surface-to-air missiles, infrared weapons, the F-105 fighters and the like. We'll also look at Vietnam bases and installations. This time it's the air base at Ton Son Nhut. Later we plan to look at Cam Ranh Bay, Da Nang, and fire bases in the field.

We'll also take a continuing look at the forces that fought the war, and spotlight personalities who particularly distinguished themselves while serving in Vietnam. Airlift forces under fire during the evacuation of Kham Duc are highlighted this time, and later we'll look at such forces as the Army's riverine forces, the Brown Water Navy, and Army and Navy Seabee engineering units. In this issue the spotlight is on Walter Marm, the "Sergeant York" of the Vietnam War and his exploits with the 1st Air Cavalry Division in the Battle of the Ia Drang. In the future we'll look at the Air Force doctor who risked his life to remove a live grenade from a wounded serviceman, and other such personalities and heroes of the war. In every issue we'll review books and films on the war.

And of course there will be the articles that comprise the heart of the magazine. In this first issue we look at the Navy and Coast Guard's Operation Market Time, the Air Force's Operation Bolo, and the Army's hand-to-hand defense ofthe Special Forces camp at Song Be.

As you can see, we are committed to illuminating not only the complexity but also the diversity of the war. In each issue we will strive to balance the ground war, the air war and the war at sea. And we will also balance the war at the front with the efforts of the men and women who provided the communications, logistical and medical support that sustained the fighting effort.

Although the emphasis will be on this period of primary U.S military involvement from 1965 to 1973, we do not intend to neglect those who served in the early years, nor the efforts of the Vietnamese Armed Forces and our other allies. For example, a future issue will look at the Australian Task Force which won an American Presidential Unit Citation for its heroic and ungorgettable actions in Vietnam.

If the enigma of the Vietnam war is to be solved, the full story must be told and documented. That is our ambition, and with your help I believe we can succeed.

H.G.S

VIETNAM

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 1

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Selfless action in the Ia Drang Valley by the man called "the Sergeant York of the Vietnam War."

By Richard Montpelier

"He'd never been in a fight in his life," said his State Trooper father afterwards. "I never knew him to be mad at anybody. I wanted to teach him to box, but he just wasn't interested."

Quiet, unassuming, Joe Marm himself says he never expected to win fame or glory in Vietnam. "I've always regarded myself as an average guy," he once said. "Average in intelligence, average in sports." Actually, he had little opportunity to develop his athletic abilities at newly established Immaculate Conception High in small, industrial Washington, Penna. A short five-ten in height, Joe Marm passed up basketball, then the school's only organized sport, for gymnasium workouts and weight-lifting.

Still making a difference, Marm—now promoted to Captain—reviews his extraordinary combat experiences with Army Basic Trainees at Fort Gordon, Georgia.

Nonetheless, he was deeply moved as a boy by Gary Cooper's movie portrayal of the World War I hero from the Tennessee Hills, Sergeant Alvin York. Marm never forgot Audie Murphy's playback of his own World War II heroics in the film *To Hell and Back*. Soon after—in the mid-1960s—instructors at the Army's tough, nine-week Ranger school approvingly sensed a gritty competitive drive in their quiet student from Washington, Penna.

Even so, one 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) officer who served with the young lieutenant in Vietnam would comment: "His temperament and manner are completely misleading—nobody would believe he's the villain he showed himself to be on the battlefield. The guy fought, well . . . like Alvin York in another day."

And that's what they called him back in November of 1965, "the Sergeant York of the Vietnam War." In one furious outburst, the plucky platoon leader had wiped out a Communist machine-gun nest, saved his own men from withering fire and killed more than a dozen of the enemy. "That little lieutenant just got up and ran them down," said an awed onlooker. "He was really killing them left and right."

Born in 1941, Joe Marm spent his boyhood in Washington, a town near Pittsburgh. His father, Walter J. Marm, Sr., was a Pennsylvania State Trooper who once served as the Governor's official chauffeur, who won honors as a crack pistol-shot and later became a State Police investigator. Upon retirement, he became Washington County's chief detective. Joe's mother Dorothy Ann, meanwhile, was a registered nurse before her three daughters and son came along.

Drawn by the forested hills and valleys near town, young Joe joined the Boy Scouts and spent almost every weekend hiking or camping out. He was chosen by his fellow Scouts for the elite Order of the Arrow. He also became a sharpshooter as a member of a local business firm's junior rifle club.

Unlike Alvin York, Joe Marm rarely hunted. "I felt sorry for the poor little animals," he once explained.

Also filling his youthful life was service as an altar boy and as a caddy at the local country club. After high school, he moved on to Duquesne University in Pittsburgh as a recipient of a golf association's annual caddy scholarship. Majoring in business administration, Joe Marm was also first-ranking shot and captain of his college rifle team.

After graduation in June 1964, he entered the Army's Officer Candidate School, Fort Benning, Ga. From there he moved on to Ranger school, then wound up with the still-experimental 1st Air Cavalry Division, then preparing for a crucial combat baptism in Vietnam.

In short time, the Army's first helicopter-borne division was in the field—'Nam. Second Lieutenant Joe Marm was assigned to Custer's old 7th Cavalry as a rifle platoon leader in A Company, 1st Battalion. And soon after the division's arrival toward the end of the summer, 1965, a major battle test loomed.

It would be fought in the central highlands of South Vietnam, near the Cambodian border and under the shadow of the brooding Chu Pong Massif. It would be known by the name of a river vally, the Ia Drang, although the fighting in October and November would rage over an area the size of Rhode Island.

A "first" in many ways, the Ia Drang campaign would be the first clash of a division-size American force against a full division of North Vietnamese regulars, the first test of the airmobile (helicopter-borne) concept of land warfare on large scale—and the first defeat of a major enemy force by a major U.S. force in Vietnam.

There were many heroes in the five-week campaign, and for its performance overall, the 1st Air Cav earned a Presidential Unit Citation, rare for division-size units.

For Joe Marm, the crucial moment of battle came on November 14. At 11 a.m., he and his men stepped off a "Huey" UH 1-D chopper at the base of the Chu Pong. Along with other ele-

Continued on page 60

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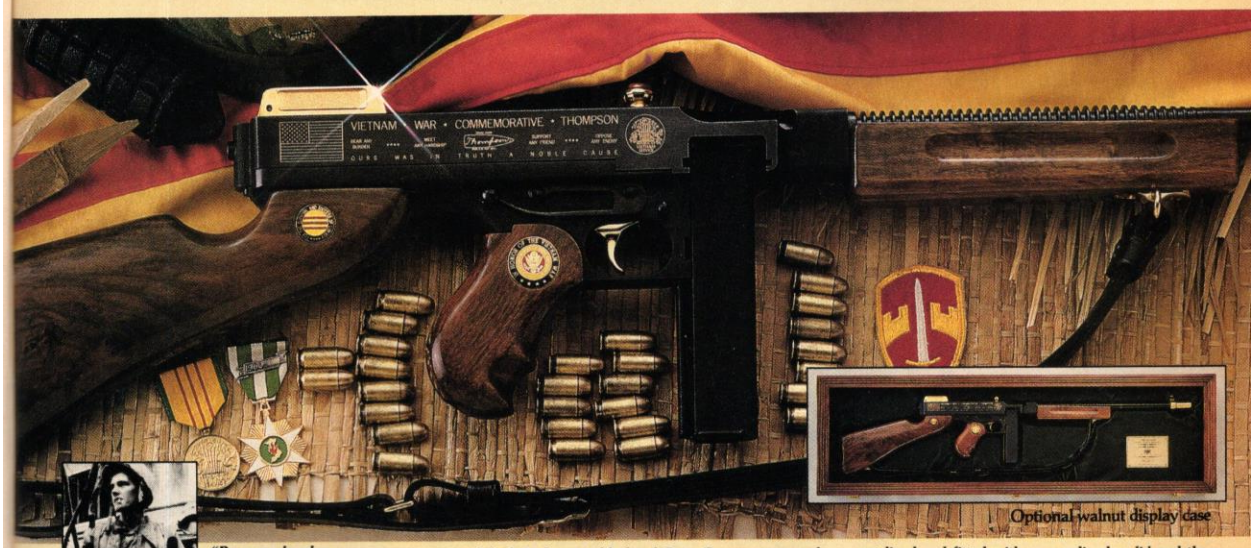

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American airlift crews proved their skill and persistence one afternoon at Kham Duc.

By Sam McGowan

The year 1968 could be called the most dramatic of all the years of American involvement in the Vietnam War. It began with the infamous Tet Offensive, marked by the capture of the Citadel in the imperial capital of Hue, and included the siege of Khe Sanh. But one particular day in 1968 also bore witness to one of the most dramatic—although little publicized—events of the war.

Kham Duc was a Special Forces-Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) camp located on the western border of South Vietnam, just a few miles from Laos. The camp, situated in an almost uninhabited part of South Vietnam southwest of the city of Da Nang, was often used by Special Forces and long-range reconnaissance patrols into Laos. It served also as a training site for South Vietnamese CIDG personnel.

Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Joe Jackson, flying a C-123 Provider transport, won the Medal of Honor for his part in the evacuation under fire of Kham Duc.

The camp and its airfield were located in a bowl-shaped valley about a mile in diameter with 2,000-foot hills on all sides. Boasting a 6,000 foot runway, the camp was kept supplied by C-130 Hercules aircraft and C-123s operating under the control of the Air Force's 834th Air Division, 7th Air Force, a unit whose task was to control all Air Force airlift within South Vietnam. The Division was headquartered at Tan Son Nhut, and all airlift aircraft permanently assigned in Vietnam were under its control.

The big C-130s, however, were in a different status from the C-123s and C-7s with which the Division was equipped. All C-130s were based outside of Vietnam with the 315th Air Division on Okinawa, Taiwan, in the Philippines and Japan—aircraft and crews served 16-day tours of duty in Vietnam, where they were promptly placed under the operational control of the 834th Air Division.

In May of 1968, shortly after the relief of the besieged Khe Sanh base—which lay slightly northwest of Kham Duc by about 100 miles—the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), began efforts to build up the defense force at Kham Duc in preparation for a suspected attack. The desirability of defending Kham Duc was enhanced by the fall of another camp several miles farther south. Due to its close proximity to enemy infiltration routes, Kham Duc was strategically located and considered important by MACV.

In April of 1968, 834th Air Division began frequent C-130 flights into Kham Duc to deliver military engineers, construction equipment and materials for strengthening the runway for sustained C-130 operations. These preparations were similar to those undertaken at Khe Sanh several months earlier. Over a four-week period, C-130s delivered more than 400 tons of cargo to Kham Duc, while two gigantic C-124 Globemasters from the 22nd Military Airlift Squadron, based at Tachikawa Air Base, Japan, brought in two 40,000-pound bulldozers that were too large for C-130 lift.

On May 10, MACV ordered reinforcements flown into Kham Duc, and C-130s were used to haul in American infantry and artillery personnel and equipment. The eleven C-130 sorties which operated into Kham Duc that day met harassing enemy artillery fire that damaged some aircraft and wounded some crewmen. The reinforcing effort continued the next day, with C-130s, C-123s and C-7s flying into the airfield. By that evening almost 1,500 Vietnamese and American troops had been brought into the camp, of which 900 were American.

But now MACV decided, on closer look, that Kham Duc lacked the importance of Khe Sanh, and was less defensible. The lines of supply were longer than those leading into Khe Sanh, while the camp lacked the facilities possessed by the Marines at Khe Sanh in terms of aircraft control and guidance. MACV ordered the camp evacuated, in large measure due to fears of the damage its fall might do to American morale, already ebbing as a result of the press reports concerning the Tet attacks.

Evacuation of a force that size from under the very guns of the enemy was virtually without precedent—no plan existed for such a procedure. Initially, MACV intended that Army and Marine helicopters would conduct the evacuation, but intense enemy fire in the early morning hours of May 12 drove away the CH-47 Chinooks sent to begin the evacuation. At 8:20 the same morning, General Burl McLaughlin, Commander of 834th Air Division, was ordered by 7th Air Force to begin an all-out effort to evacuate Kham Duc.

The 834th immediately sent two C-130s directly to the camp and directed others to Da Nang, where they were to await further developments. Both C-

Continued on page 64

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Tan Son Nhut Air Base was America's "Pentagon East" all during the Vietnam War.

By Shelby L. Stanton

As Communist forces in Vietnam launched their famous Tet Offensive at the end of January 1968, the prime targets were South Vietnam's major cities, its provincial capitals, even the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, which was invaded by a 19-man suicide squad of Viet Cong guerrillas. Nearly lost to public sight as the northern city of Hue and other objectives were temporarily overrun was the battle for one of the best-known installations in all Vietnam, Tan Son Nhut Air Base at Saigon.

During their abortive 1968 Tet Offensive, the Viet Cong attack on strategic Tan Son Nhut airbase was repulsed by counterattacking U.S. infantrymen.

Tan Son Nhut, in fact, was a major Viet Cong target during the Communist offensive of Tet-68. In the early morning of January 31, 1968, the VC D-16 and 267th Battalions joined forces with a battalion of the 271st VC Regiment to attack the sprawling airfield. The Viet Cong headquarters was positioned in the Vinatexco textile mill just across Highway 1 on the western side of the air base. The VC emplaced heavy weapons in the mill to support the assault. A number of antiaircraft guns were put on the roof to render covering fire during the VC attack.

The Viet Cong assaulted Tan Son Nhut's "Sensitive Area" perimeter at 3:21 a.m. and overran the western fence line at Gate Number 51. Rocket-propelled grenades were used to destroy the bunkers guarding this sector of the airfield, and the VC swarmed through the smashed gateway. Secondary attacks were also staged against Gate Number 10, on the east side of the airfield, and Gate Number 58 on the northern perimeter. Three battalions of Viet Cong soon overwhelmed the few U.S. Air Force security police and Vietnamese defenders and poured onto the airport grounds.

At stake in the battle's outcome was one of the most important military installations of Vietnam during the Second Indochina War, an importance dating back to September 12, 1945, when British commonwealth troops landed at Tan Son Nhut airfield, on the northern outskirts of Saigon, along with a detachment of 150 French soldiers. The mixed Allied force was airlifted into Indochina shortly after Japan had surrendered to reimpose French authority over the region. Tan Son Nhut continued to gain importance as air travel increased, and its position as Saigon's major civilian and military air terminal caused continual expansion and upgrading.

When South Vietnam became independent, Tan Son Nhut Air Base became the airport of a capital city. The base was one of Vietnam's three airfields capable of accepting jet aircraft before 1965. Even a year later, when six jet-capable fields were in operation after hasty American construction, Tan Son Nhut remained one of the only air terminals with high-intensity lighting and suitable radio, navigation, and ground equipment.

Tan Son Nhut's complex communications and radar facilities were actually established when a U.S. Air Force mobile control and reporting post (CRP) was sent to Vietnam at the direction of President Kennedy in September 1961. This post consisted of a detachment of the 507th Tactical Control Group from Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina. The control and reporting post became operational at Tan Son Nhut on October 5, providing radar control and warning for the entire Saigon area. The post also served as a training site for South Vietnamese radar technicians. This event marked the first permanent American unit to be installed at Tan Son Nhut to help run the vital airport for military purposes.

As American involvement in South Vietnam continued to escalate, Tan Son Nhut gained greater importance. American command structures soon hedged in the airport's sprawling concrete runways and side ramps.

On October 8, 1962, the 2nd U.S. Air Division was organized at Tan Son Nhut, an organization that later would become the basis of the 7th Air Force. On December 8, the 315th Troop Carrier Group, later redesignated as an Air Commando Group, was organized at Tan Son Nhut. (This unit was inactivated at the same base in March 1966.)

Air Force communications at Tan Son Nhut were greatly enhanced with the organization of the 1964th Communications Squadron on May 1, 1962. By October 1, the unit was upgraded to an entire group. The Air Force base radars were linked to the South Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF) tactical air control system. Later, the tactical air control system was refined and expanded until, by the end of the year, it included the Air Force Tactical Air Control Center. This center at Tan Son Nhut allowed the Air Force commander in Vietnam to plan and coordinate tactical air operations throughout the entire Southeast Asian region. In August 1964, MACV (Military Assistance Command, Vietnam) also located its Army Air Operations section with the joint USAF-

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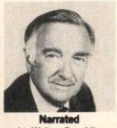

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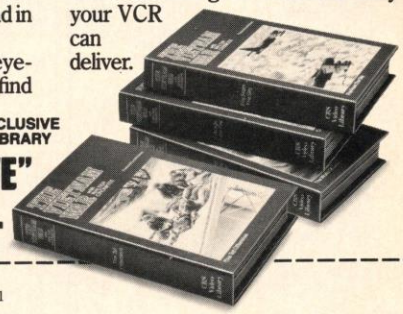

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VNAF Air Operations Center at Tan Son Nhut.

The Air Force then established the Air Support Operations Center and Joint Operations Center at Tan Son Nhut to track air support requirements for the rising advisory effort throughout the Vietnamese countryside. On November 20, 1962, Brig. Gen. Rollen H. Anthis assumed command of the "Ranch Hand" defoliation aerial spraying campaign from his Tan Son Nhut Air Base increased as well, necessitating further improvements. On April 1, 1966, the 7th Air Force was organized at Tan Son Nhut under the command of Lieut. Gen. Joseph H. Moore. Other important Air Force organizations located at the base during the year included the 834th Air Division, established at Tan Son Nhut on October 25. The 315th Tactical Airlift Wing was based at Tan Son Nhut from March 8 until it moved to Phan Rang on June 15, 1967. The 460th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing was organized at Tan son Nhut on February 18 and remained there throughout its service in Vietnam. The 3rd Aero Rescue & Recovery Group was organized January 8, 1966.

The most important military development at Tan Son Nhut, however, was the construction of the MACV headquarters, or "Pentagon East" as the troops called it. The network of two-story, prefabricated buildings provided air-conditioned working space for 4,000 officers and their staffs. The MACV headquarters compound at Tan Son Nhut included billets, utility systems, mortar-proof shelters, security fences and guard towers.

American Air Force utilization of Tan Son Nhut Air Base only increased during 1966. On April 1, 1966, the 7th Air Force was organized at Tan Son Nhut under the command of Lieut. Gen. Joseph H. Moore. Other important Air Force organizations located at the base during the year included the 834th Air Division, established at Tan Son Nhut on October 25. The 315th Tactical Airlift Wing was based at Tan Son Nhut from March 8 until it moved to Phan Rang on June 15, 1967. The 460th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing was organized at Tan Son Nhut on February 18 and remained there throughout its service in Vietnam. The 3rd Aero Rescue & Recovery Group was organized January 8, 1966.

The massive MACV and Seventh Air Force headquarters at Tan Son Nhut severely taxed existing facilities. Many subordinate units occupied convenient facilities on base property, having built their own structures in a relatively haphazard fashion during the American buildup inside South Vietnam. This combined density of buildings and men posed a tremendous logistical burden to the limited space available at the air base.

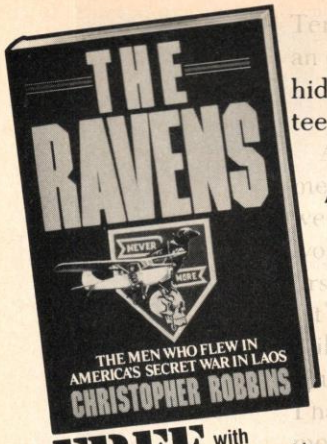
The traffic and congestion at Tan Son Nhut became intolerable by 1967. Throughout the first part of the year, the United States deployed approximately half of its military personnel stationed in Saigon 16 miles west to the large Long Binh-Bien Hoa installation. This move reduced headquarters congestion at the capital and at Tan Son Nhut. After July 15, 1967, the only military personnel actually located near or on the Tan Son Nhut Air Base were those whose duty required close proximity to airfield operations or to MACV headquarters itself.

By the time of the Tet Offensive, the still congested and vital base facility loomed as a tempting target for VC attack. And when it came, the initial impetus allowed three VC battalions to swarm past fences and defenders alike.

In response, all available troops on the air base were gathered for further defense and counterattack. The emergency battle group included the USAF 377th Security Police Squadron; two platoons of U.S. Army, Vietnam, headquarters guards; South Vietnamese national field police; the 52nd Vietnamese Regional Force Battalion; the 2nd Vietnamese Service Battalion and even Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky's own bodyguard. This force prevented a complete Viet Cong victory over Tan Son Nhut, but was forced to retreat under heavy pressure.

The Tan Son Nhut defense force requested immediate reinforcements at 4:15 a.m. At that time, the only units available were two paratrooper companies of the elite Vietnamese 8th Airborne Battalion. These additional troops charged into the smoking airport battleground to clear the advancing Viet Cong from the runway. At the same time, the 25th Infantry Division's 3rd Squadron of the 4th Cavalry fought its way down Highway 1 and struck the Viet Cong from the rear between the base and their supplies at the textile mill.

The battle for the runway within the air base and the battle to clear the road were actually separate contests, but the fate of Tan Son Nhut depended on successful outcomes in both engagements. The VC fought back with rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns and mortars. Many of the American armored personnel carriers and tanks were demolished in the highway skirmish, but the arrival of heavy armor decided the outcome. The Viet



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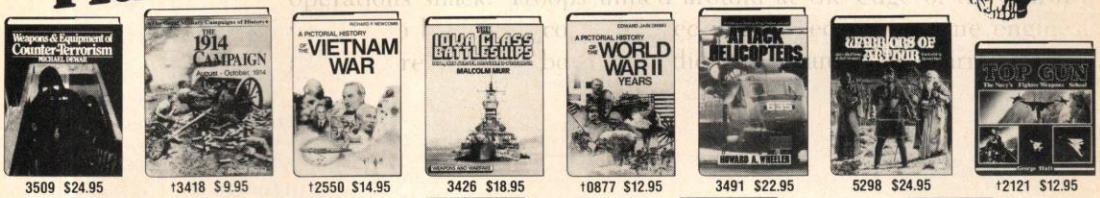

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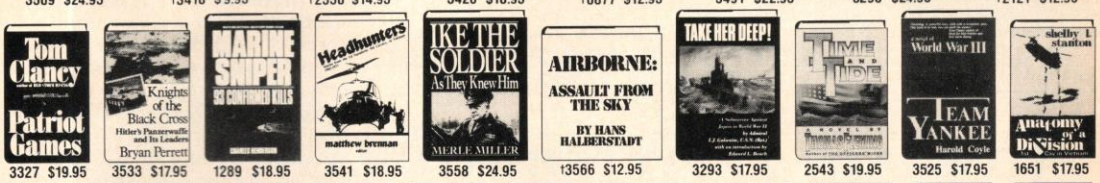

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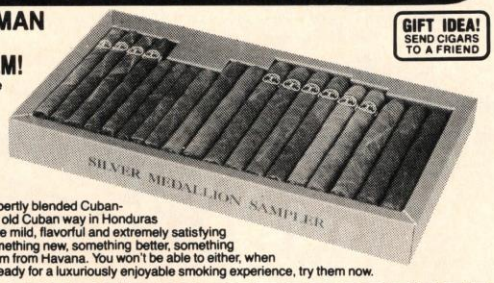

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Cong were forced to retreat to better defensive positions at the mill, and soon the VC within the air base were totally surrounded.

The clearing operations at Tan Son Nhut lasted well into the next morning. An American master sergeant was able to lead one element to retake Gate Number 51 at noon, February 1. This action effectively cleared the base of enemy personnel, although mopping up continued throughout the day. Air operations at Tan Son Nhut were reduced to a sporadic, emergency basis and airlift service throughout the embattled country was disrupted. The Battle of Tan Son Nhut Air Base was one of the most important engagements of Tet-68.

Air base security was an important factor in MACV plans for Tan Son Nhut during the remainder of the war. However, the complex was never subjected to another ground attack while the 7th Air Force was stationed there. Much of the American equipment at Tan Son Nhut was turned over to the South Vietnamese during the period of 1971-1973. As the final North Vietnamese offensive against the South gathered momentum in the spring of 1975, Tan Son Nhut became crucial to the orderly evacuation of remaining U.S. personnel. Operation Frequent Wind, or the Talon Vise Plan, was a complex contingency plan developed by MACV and the U.S. Embassy for the complete withdrawal of all Americans and certain important Vietnamese personnel from Saigon.

The U.S. Defense Attache Office created a command post at Tan Son Nhut Air Base as an integral part of the Talon Vise operation. The flow of evacuation aircraft was kept deliberately slow at first, but the pace of the operation picked up by the middle of April 1975. The Defense Attache command post began daily processing of 5,000 or more persons selected for departure from Vietnam. The long lines of Americans and Vietnemese moved in seemingly endless processions through the maze of checkpoint and indentity verification stations set up at Tan Son Nhut.

On April 29, 1975, the North Vietnamese Army suddenly initiated a continuous rocket barrage against Tan Son Nhut. The constant artillery pounding of the airport forced the United States to scramble helicopters from its fleet offshore to complete the evacuation. This final episode—in the last days of South Vietnam's existence—marked the end of Tan Son Nhut Air Base's utility for the Americans and their South Vietnamese allies. □

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TROOPS TO EQUAL ANY

One of the saddest legacies of the Vietnam War is the cruel misperception that the American fighting men there did not measure up to their predecessors in World War II and Korea. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Interview by Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr.

That the Vietnam War was one of the most complex wars in our history was little understood at the time, and it is even less understood today. Many still believe, for example, that the war was lost to black-pajama-clad Viet Cong guerrillas, armed only with primitive weapons and revolutionary fervor.

Their attitudes evidently fixed in the early 1960s, when the Viet Cong were at their height, such critics fail to appreciate—as the North Vietnamese now freely admit—that the Viet Cong guerrillas were virtually annihilated during their abortive 1968 Tet Offensive, and from that time on the war was primarily a North Vietnamese regular-army affair. It was a North Vietnamese, 22-division, cross-border blitzkrieg, supported by tanks, missiles and heavy artillery—not Viet Cong guerrillas—that finally overwhelmed South Vietnam in the spring of 1975.

Then there is the notion that the war was lost because of the failure of American arms. Again, there is little realization that American ground combat forces began to withdraw from Vietnam in 1969—not because of enemy pressure but because of political decisions made in Washington. By the end of 1971, most of the Army and Marine combat divisions had left, and in August 1972 the last American ground-combat unit, the 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry, departed Vietnam. With the signing of the Paris Peace Accords in March 1973 (more than two years before the fall of Saigon), all remaining American naval, air and logistics support forces were withdrawn.

The 1975 North Vietnamese spring offensive which finally conquered South Vietnam did not defeat the American military for the simple reason that by that time there was no American military there to defeat. Not only had American Forces been withdrawn years earlier, Congress had categorically and unequivocally prohibited their re-intervention.

Vietnam was a defeat for American foreign policy, and for its political goals of containing Communist expansion and maintaining a free and independent South Vietnam. And it was a defeat for the ill-conceived plans and strategies of the Pentagon's senior military and civilian leaders.

But America's fighting forces did not fail us. "You know, you never beat us on the battlefield," I told my North Vietnamese counterpart during negotiations in Hanoi a week before the fall of Saigon. He pondered that remark a moment, and then replied, "That may be so, but it is also irrevelant."

In a narrow strategic sense he was right. Whether they defeated us on the battlefield or not, they did win the war. But in another sense he was dead wrong, for that fact was relevant indeed to the almost 3½ million Americans who served in Southeast Asia during the war. Many of them still bear a burden they do not deserve and blame themselves for what went wrong there.

No one is better qualified to set that record straight and put the fighting abilities of American combat forces in Vietnam in historical perspective than General Fred C. Weyand. A 1938 graduate of the University of California at Berkeley, he entered military service in 1940 and served as an intelligence officer in the China-Burma-India theater in World War II. During the Korean War he won the Combat Infantry Badge and Silver Star for gallantry in action while commanding the 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment. Under his leadership the battalion won a Presidential Unit Citation for its part in turning back the 1951 Chinese spring offensive.

In March 1966, then a major general, he brought his 25th Infantry Division to Vietnam. Headquartered at Cu Chi in War Zone C, his "Tropic Lightning" division saw hard fighting in areas west and northwest of Saigon and along the Cambodian border. His battlefield successes led to command of II Field Force, a corps-level headquarters responsible for military operations in III and IV Corps (i.e., the southern third of South Vietnam from the southern boundary of the Central Highlands through the Mekong Delta.)

During the Viet Cong's 1968 Tet Offensive, General

The intensity and scope of the Viet Cong's Tet offensive caught the South Vietnamese and the Americans by surprise. Here, government troops doggedly pursue their fight in Cholon, the Chinese suburb of Saigon.

Weyand's timely and effective maneuver of II Field Force's combat elements—including the U.S. 1st Infantry Division, 9th Infantry Division, 25th Infantry Division, 101st Airborne Division, 199th Light Infantry Brigade, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and the Australian Task Force—was instrumental in saving Saigon from capture and in the subsequent rout of the Viet Cong attackers.

Later that year, after 2½ years in-country, General Weyand was reassigned to Washington as chief of the Army's Reserve Components, then to Paris as an observer at the Paris talks. Returning to Vietnam in 1970, first as deputy commander and than commander of the U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (COMUSMACV), he supervised the U.S. military withdrawal and was America's last military commander in Vietnam.

In 1975, by then Army Chief of Staff, General Weyand was sent back to Vietnam by President Ford to assess the military situation there. Although his recommendations fell on deaf ears in the Administration and in the Congress, he did not allow himself—or the Army—to become embittered. Named "Man of the Year" at the University of California at Berkeley in 1976, he left office later that year and returned to civilian life, but not before being credited by the Congress for his leadership role in preventing a "stab-in-the-back" syndrome from developing in the American Army after Vietnam.

Active in several civilian business enterprises, General Weyand now lives in Honolulu.

Summers: If you had to pick one thing that disturbs you most about the Vietnam War, what would that be?

Weyand: What particularly haunts me, what I think is one of the saddest legacies of the Vietnam War, is the cruel misperception that the American fighting men there did not measure up to their predecessors in World War II and Korea. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Summers: You saw first-hand the combat soldiers in World War II?

Weyand: Yes, as a young officer I went into Burma in June 1944 to serve as an intelligence officer on General "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell's staff. And I watched Merrill's Marauders go into the battle for Myitkyina. Now here was an outfit that had been organized for one mission, and ended up taking part in five. By that time they were pretty badly beat up, but those soldiers left hospital beds to rejoin their outfit to take part in the battle. One could not help but be impressed. They set a pretty high standard for others to follow.

Summers: You're saying that others did?

Weyand: They did. As a lieutenant colonel I went into Korea in August 1950 with the advance party for the 3rd Infantry Division, then staging in Japan. In January 1951, I took command of the 1st Battalion, 7th Infantry Regiment, nicknamed the "Cottonbalers" for their defense of New Orleans under Andy Jackson during the War of 1812. They had just come back from blocking for the 1st Marine Division and 7th Infantry Division during the retreat from the Chosin Reservoir, and the battalion only had 162 Americans. The rest were KATUSAs [*Korean Augmentaion to the U.S. Army*—South Korean civilians press-ganged into military service and used to round-out understrength U.S. units], most of whom could not speak English. But the battalion was all that a commander could wish for. Three months after I took over, the Chinese hit the Eighth Army front with nine field armies—some 250,000 men organized into 27 infantry divisions. We were blocking on the Uijongbu-Seoul road and the Chinese hit us head-on. The battalion put up one hell of a fight, especially Captain Harley Mooney's Able Company and Ray Blandin's Baker Company. Two soldiers—Corporal John Essebager and Corporal Clair Goodblood—won the Medal of Honor

posthumously, and for that rear-guard action the battalion, officially credited with "killing over 3,000 enemy troops and wounding an estimated 5,500," won a Presidential Unit Citation.

The point of all this is that my earlier experiences provided a personal standard with which to measure battlefield performance. And by those standards the soldiers I served with in Vietnam fully measured up to those of Merrill's Marauders in World War II or the Cottonbalers in Korea. In many ways, they even went them one better.

Summers: How was that?

Weyand: Well, in World War II and Korea an infantryman's task was straight-forward: close with the enemy and destroy him with fire and maneuver. After a while on the line a kind of numbness took over. I can still remember going up and down those ridges in Korea. A few days of that and it became simply a matter of putting one foot in front of the other until you hit the enemy, and then it was pretty much conventional ground combat. But in Vietnam it was another story. I recall one week where one element of the Wolfhounds [the nickname of the 27th Infantry, two battalions of which served in Weyand's 25th Infantry Division] was in hard fighting in the Bo Loi woods, where they took 15 killed and an even greater number wounded. Another element was conducting a division training program in long range patrolling. Yet another was conducting training classes for the 25th ARVN [*Army of the Republic of Vietnam*] Division. Still another was providing security for a medical team in a local village. And finally some were at a local Catholic school the men had adopted, where their donations had bought textbooks, paid teachers' salaries, and provided school lunches for the children.

Ten days later the unit that had been in the Bo Loi was conducting training programs, and the unit that had been at the school was beating the bush. One day they were safe, watching little children at school; the next they were in mortal danger, watching for someone to pop out of the ground and try to kill them.

It's hard to put in words what a terrible burden that imposed. You had to go through it to fully understand the incredible psychological strain they were under. It was a hell of a burden our soldiers in Vietnam had to bear. They really had to have their heads screwed on right to survive. Yet throughout it all they performed magnificantly. They did everything that was asked of them and more. I have every reason to be proud of their service. And America should be equally proud and grateful to them.

Summers: You mentioned the local school sponsored by American soldiers. The common perception is that American forces in Vietnam did more to abuse the local population than it did to assist them.

Weyand: I guess that during my five years in Vietnam I paid more than a thousand visits to U.S. units in the field. And in almost every case they would begin their briefing with an account of what they had been doing to help the villagers in their area—medical team visits; help to local churches; schools and orphanages; road building, construction assistance and the like. For every terrible aberration like My Lai, there were thousands of acts of charity and compassion. Yet you would never know that from what was reported here at home.

Summers: Although the American people are unaware of those facts, the South Vietnamese people certainly know the truth. When Marine veteran Bill Broyles returned to Vietnam in 1984, he found an enormous reservoir of good-will toward Americans. So perhaps we planted some seeds there that may someday take root.

And speaking of the way things were reported here at home, one of the worst cases has to be the news coverage

TOP: Soldiers of the Communist Vietnam Peoples' Army cheer successful comrades recently returned from combat in the South. They never defeated the U.S. in the field, though. MIDDLE: Major General Frederick C. Weyand (left) with U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge reviewing the 25th Infantry Division at its Cu Chi base camp on Aug. 12, 1966. ABOVE: More than 58,000 American soldiers were killed in Vietnam, and many more wounded (as here) during a conflict that ultimately saw over 2,500,000 U.S. servicemen and women engaged, in all branches of military.

of the Viet Cong's Tet Offensive of 1968. You commanded II Field Force then and have been credited with frustrating the Viet Cong's plans to capture Saigon. Did you have advance warning of the attack?

Weyand: Not as such. We did know that something was coming, but our intelligence was not good enough to pinpoint exactly what they were up to. And as a former intelligence officer, I have to admit that lack of proper intelligence has been a grievous inadequacy in our military forces for years. In Korea I'd get orders to attack at 0500, but not a word about what was out there. In fact, I don't believe I ever went into battle knowing what I was going to run into. To the armchair analysts years after the event, everything looks neat, orderly and predictable. But that's certainly not the case at the time.

Anyway, our radio intercepts began picking up the movement of units toward Saigon, which caused us to cancel a major multi-division operation we had planned to launch in the northern part of III Corps, about 100 miles north of Saigon. That really proved to be a stroke of good fortune, for if those units had gone north the Viet Cong would have had a field day in Saigon.

Summers: What other actions did you take?

Weyand: On the basis of this sketchy intelligence I did reposition some units and moved the forces into blocking positions covering the approaches to Saigon. Although all II Field Force units were put on full alert several hours before the Viet Cong launched their attack, we really had no precise information on exactly where they would strike. We certainly didn't know they'd get inside the U.S. Embassy grounds in the heart of Saigon. Although that made for some sensational news photos, from a military viewpoint it really didn't do them much good. Seizing a position and holding it are two different things. And the Viet Cong were unable to hold. They were repulsed everywhere with staggering losses—so much so that, as the North Vietnamese now freely admit, they ceased to be an effective fighting force. The last seven years of the war—from 1968 to 1975—were almost exculsively a North Vietnamese regular-army affair.

Summers: How did the Viet Cong fail?

Weyand: I think the Viet Cong made two major mistakes. First, by attacking everywhere at once, they fragmented their forces and laid themselves open to defeat in detail. Second, and most importantly, they believed their own propaganda and thought there would be a "great general uprising" wherein the South Vietnamese people would flock to their banner. There was a great general uprising all right, but it was against them rather than for them. The vast majority of the South Vietnamese people wanted nothing to do with the Viet Cong. During the entire course of the war there were never any mass defections by the South Vietnamese. But it is interesting to note that in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive, more than 150,000 Viet Cong deserters came over to our side.

Summers: But that's not the way it was reported here at home. The news media—and especially the television news media—portrayed it as a major defeat. President Lyndon Johnson reportedly said that when the CBS News anchorman Walter Cronkite came out against the war, he knew that it was all over and decided not to run for re-election.

Weyand: I can understand the initial reporting. After all the glowing reports that the war was about to wind down, the Tet Offensive came as a terrible shock. But the Battle of the Bulge in 1944 was also a terrible shock. Like the Viet Cong's Tet Offensive, it was a desperate gamble to win the war in a single stroke. And it, too, initially provoked some sensationalist headlines as the U.S. forces reeled back and entire units surrendered to the enemy. But as it progressed, the news media finally got the story straight.

Summers: I think you're saying that unlike the Battle of the Bulge, with Tet the initial impression became the accepted wisdom. But there were some balanced accounts. It was Peter Braestrup, once the Saigon bureau chief for *The Washington Post*, who exposed such shoddy reporting in his book, *The Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet 1968 in Vietnam and Washington*. It was Vietnam war correspondent Don Oberdorfer who wrote *Tet: The Turning Point of the Vietnam War*, which also set the record straight. And it was another former war correspondent, Stanley Karnow, author of *Vietnam: A History*, who got the Viet Cong to admit how badly they had been mauled.

Weyand: True. But unfortunately those books were written long after the event, and long after the damage had been done. Don't get me wrong. I believe strongly that a free press is essential to our democracy. And I've never subscribed to the simple-minded notion that the media lost the Vietnam War. I think most of the war correspondents in Vietnam were competent and capable professionals. But I also think—and the reporting of Tet is a prime example—that the media wields such great influence in shaping public opinion that it must be especially careful to get the story straight. The American people deserve at least that.

Summers: Your comment about public opinion raises another issue. Several years ago Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger laid out six preconditions for the commitment of U.S. military forces to combat abroad. One of the most controversial was his conviction that there must be some reasonable assurance of public and congressional support. Do you agree with that assessment?

Weyand: I think he had it exactly right, and the Vietnam War proved his point. In 1976, in a message to the Army, I laid out some of my observations on the Vietnam War. "Vietnam was a reaffirmation of the peculiar relationship between the American Army and the American people," I said. "The American Army really is a people's Army in the sense that it belongs to the American people who take a jealous and proprietary interest in its involvement. When the Army is committed the American people are committed, when the American people lose their commitment it is futile to try to keep the Army committed." When the American people lost their commitment after the Tet Offensive of 1986, for all intents and purposes the war was lost. I think President Nixon realized that fact, and that's why soon after he entered office he ordered a gradual withdrawal of American combat forces and the "Vietnamization" of the war.

Summers: Why did they lose their commitment? Was it just because of the perceived "defeat" in Tet?

Weyand: No, it was much more than that. Tet was just the final straw. The fundamental reason, as you pointed out in your book *On Strategy*, was the lack of clear-cut and understandable political and military objectives. That was true from top to bottom. When Clark Clifford took over as Secretary of Defense after Tet 1968, he found that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had no concept of victory and no plan to end the war. And that was the case in Saigon as well. As you know, a "Letter of Instruction" is the means by which the President, as Commander-in-Chief, issues orders to his commanders in the field for the conduct of military operations. For example, President Roosevelt's Letter of Instruction to General Eisenhower in World War II began "You will invade the continent of Europe . . ." But during our quarter-century involvement in Vietnam, no President—not Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon

or Ford—ever issued such clear-cut instructions to their military commanders in Vietnam.

In 1974, Brigadier General Douglas Kinnard did a survey and found that "almost 70 percent of the Army generals who managed the war were uncertain of its objectives." As he concluded, that "mirrors a deep-seated strategic failure: the failure of policy-makers to frame tangible, obtainable goals." It was this lack of a sense of purpose that finally turned the American people against the war. The antiwar movement likes to take credit for it—why anyone would want to take "credit" for the resulting massacre of some three million Cambodians, the consignment of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese to forced-labor camps, and the suffering of over a million Indochinese boat people is beyond me—but I believe they're wrong. The turnaround was more pragmatic than ideological. It was the fall of 1967 when polls showed that for the first time more Americans were against the war than in support of it. And I think that shift took place because of public suspicion that the government didn't know what it was doing. When the Tet Offensive hit several months later it merely confirmed that suspicion—especially when President Lyndon B. Johnson gave up on the war.

Summers: Such a misreading of events could have led to the development of a "stab-in-the-back syndrome" within the American military. The feeling among German Army veterans after World War I was that their political leaders had betrayed them, and that led to the destruction of the Weimar Republic and brought Adolf Hitler to power. The same type of reaction led to open military revolt in France after Algeria, and to a military coup in Portugal after Angola. But it never happened here, and when you retired from active in duty in 1976, the House of Representatives and the Senate gave you credit for preventing such a reaction in the American Army. How did you bring it about?

Weyand: Well, for one thing I thought the whole notion of a "stab-in-the-back syndrome" was overblown. All military officers take an oath to defend the U.S. Constitution without any reservation, and to defer to the civilian command of the President. I took that responsibility very seriously, as do virtually all of the members of our Armed Services. In any event, I was fortunate to have a solid foundation on which to build. It had been laid by my predecessor as Army Chief of Staff, General Creighton Abrams, who turned the Army away from its Vietnam troubles and reoriented it to its vital security interests in Europe and Northeast Asia. He persuaded the Congress to stabilize the Army's manpower and obtained its approval to activate three new divisions rounded out with brigades from the National Guard. Most importantly, he gave the Army a sense of mission and a sense of self-worth. After his tragic death in office, I saw it as my responsibility to continue the work he had begun. It is General Abrams who should get the lion's share of credit.

Summers: It's now 15 years since all American combat forces were withdrawn from Vietnam. Do you see an improvement in public attitudes toward Vietnam veterans?

Weyand: As I said earlier, America should have been proud of them from the start, for they were a remarkable group of young men and women. Now they're finally beginning to get their due, and it's gratifying to see the increased public recognition of the dedication, bravery, and compassion the overwhelming majority of these men and women displayed while they were serving in Vietnam. □

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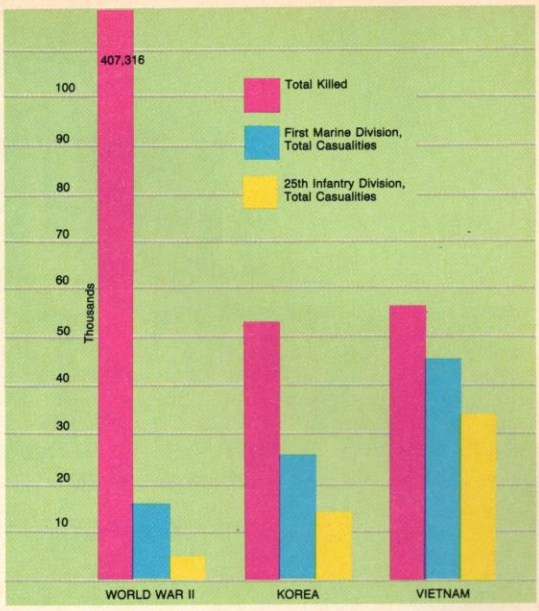


TOP: A grim point of reference, total number of troops killed in three conflicts is in red. For two units in all three, including Weyand's 25th Infantry, the toll was highest in Nam. ABOVE: A U.S. Marine infantryman proceeds warily across a footbridge over a stream carrying on his shoulder the standard M-60 machine gun.

SUPPORT LINES ENGAGED

Blazing firefights punctuated the long periods of routine boredom for the sailors of Operation Market Time—the surveillance and blockade of South Vietnam's coast. Here, with an assortment of patrol craft at work, was one supply line effectively bottled up.

By Clarence E. Wunderlin, Jr.

The night sky blazed crimson with the fire of the ship's .50-caliber machine guns. Gunners pumped round after round into the North Vietnamese trawler that only moments before had answered the American's warning shots with her own burst of machine-gun fire. In the pre-dawn hours, the United States Coast Guard Cutter *Point League* had taken two hits—one an incendiary round that had knocked down her Executive Officer and temporarily blinded her Commanding Officer and helmsman. But, undaunted, the cutter began the first of three firing runs. The enemy trawler would pay dearly for the hits she had scored.

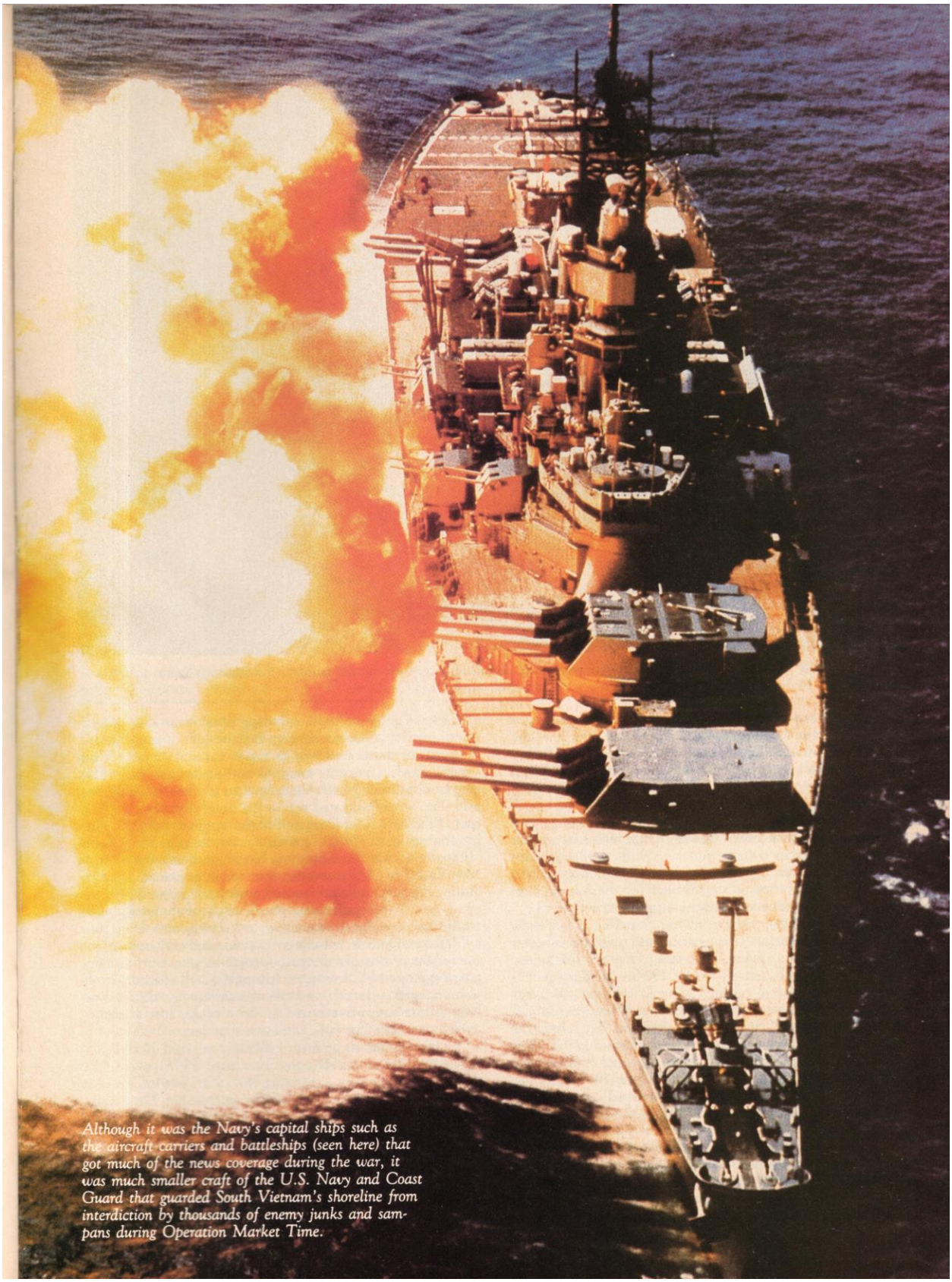
Thus began one of the most dramatic engagements of Operation Market Time—the surveillance of South Vietnam's coast. Naval units had been on the trail of this particular infiltrator since the previous day. Discovered by an SP2B reconnaissance plane 80 miles east of the Con Son Islands on the afternoon of June 19, 1966, the steel-hulled trawler, heavily laden with 100 tons of Soviet-bloc munitions, had zig-zagged to evade American and South Vietnamese patrols. Tipped off by the spotter plane, the *Point League* caught the 100-foot trawler after midnight as she dashed toward the mouth of the Co Chien River.

The cutter closed to within four miles, challenged the as-yet-unidentified ship with flashing light, but received no response. Suddenly *Point League*'s radar picked up a second contact near the first. The cutter closed quickly to 600 yards—illumination found the trawler with a junk alongside. Immediately the trawler steamed off, deserting her 40-foot companion, and headed toward the beach. *Point League* fired a warning burst. When the trawler continued undeterred, the cutter went to general quarters. Her commander then ordered the second warning burst that drew the heated reply.

So began an exchange that lasted for over two hours. The junk probably sank in the initial conflagration. The trawler ran aground along the Viet Cong-held coastline, machine-gun fire still streaming from her deck. Joined by helicopter fire teams and reconnaissance planes, *Point League* pounded her target with mortar and machine-gun fire. At dawn the cutter closed to investigate the damaged trawler, only to draw fierce automatic weapons fire from the sand dunes. Forced to withdraw, *Point League* summoned airstrikes to pummel the shoreline. Unexpectedly, as the strikes commenced, the trawler rocked with an explosion that torched her after-hold and pilot house.

The naval task-force commander spared no effort to salvage the trawler. The Coast Guard cutter *Point Slocum* replaced *Point League* as the latter replenished her ammunition stores. *Point Slocum* also drew fire as she pulled to within 800 yards of the beach. Once again helicopter fire teams joined the fight, as the cutter made run after run, only to draw recoilless-rifle and mortar fire. *Point Slocum* withdrew to allow the air support to thoroughly pummel the beach, and the dunes fell silent.

With resistance smashed, the dangerous job of salvage could begin. Two destroyers, a third cutter and units of the Vietnamese Navy's Coastal Group 35 and River Assault Group 23 converged on the combat zone during the morning hours. By noon on June 20, South Vietnamese troops had established a defensive perimeter ashore. At great risk, salvage teams extinguished onboard fires and began the dewatering process. After initial attempts to tow the trawler out to sea had failed, sailors and soldiers set up defenses for the night. The following morning, a harbor clearance team righted the ship and unloaded more of her munitions cargo—weapons and supplies certainly destined for main-force Communist units north of Saigon rather than the Delta's guerrillas. Over the next two days, U.S. and Vietnamese ships combined to tow the trawler to Saigon via the Soirap River, thus ending a suspenseful confrontation at the surfline.



Although it was the Navy's capital ships such as the aircraft carriers and battleships (seen here) that got much of the news coverage during the war, it was much smaller craft of the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard that guarded South Vietnam's shoreline from interdiction by thousands of enemy junks and sampans during Operation Market Time.

In-country, South Vietnam's southern portion was criss-crossed by waterways such as this canal in the Mekong Delta, which were patrolled by heavily-armed riverine task forces to deny their use to the Viet Cong.

Like other patrol craft engaged that night, *Point League* was a component of Market Time's Task Force 115, the Coastal Surveillance Force, comprised mainly of U.S. and Vietnamese patrol craft. Increased Communist infiltration and the deterioration of South Vietnam's army prompted the Johnson Administration to approve a build-up of American armed forces in Southeast Asia in 1965. The Coastal Surveillance Force was only one task force of an in-country naval presence that by 1968 would include Game Warden river patrols, a Mobile Riverine Force, Seabees, SEAL commandos, advisors for the Vietnamese Navy and an impressive logistical support structure.

Deployed to fight the war at the coastline, Operation Market Time's mission, organization and operations began with the discovery of an infiltrating North Vietnamese trawler off Vung Ro in February 1965—coastal surveillance then increased rapidly. The U.S. Seventh Fleet initiated patrols with two destroyers and land-based aircraft in March. With President Lyndon B. Johnson's approval, Seventh Fleet activated Task Force 71, the Vietnam Patrol Force. By month's end, ten ships and ten aircraft patrolled the coastal area. In August 1965 the U.S. Naval Advisory Group assumed command of the patrol force and activated Task Force 115. Administrative and logistical support for Operation Market Time—named for that most active time in coastal waters—remained with Seventh Fleet. Eight months later Naval Forces, Vietnam, relieved the advisory group of operational responsibility for Market Time units. Similarly, naval bases at Saigon and Danang relieved the fleet of its support duties.

Market Time units assumed many missions as U.S. armed forces continued their build-up, but the halt of seaborne infiltration of munitions was its major task. As in the *Point League*-trawler incident, weapons and equipment moved by ship from ports in North Vietnam into the South China Sea and then were infiltrated across the beach into South Vietnam. Similarly, Viet Cong junks and sampans passed silently among the 50,000 civilian craft sailing the South Vietnamese coast. In addition to blocking waterborne infiltration, Task Force 115 assisted ground forces by providing naval gunfire support and blocking enemy escape routes. While carrying out these operations, patrol craft often transported troops and evacuated casualties. In keeping with U.S. policy, Market Time units frequently evacuated civilians caught in crossfire and waged a vigorous psychological warfare campaign against the Communist insurgents. All coastal patrols also engaged in search and rescue missions for downed pilots, sailors swept overboard or for civilians lost at sea.
swept overboard or for civilians lost at sea.

To accomplish its primary blockade mission, Task Force 115 divided the 1,200-mile coast into eight (eventually nine) patrol sectors extending 40 miles out to sea. To detect and interdict enemy shipping, Market Time commanders set up three offshore barriers. Based in Thailand and the Philippine Islands, as well as Vietnam, surveillance aircraft formed a shield over a network of surface patrols. Initially, carrier-based A1 Skyraiders assisted P3 Orions from Sangley Point in the Philippines and P2 Neptunes from Tan Son Nhut Airbase in coastal surveillance. For two years beginning in mid-1965, P5 Marlin seaplanes,

Aside from the strictly surface vessel aspect of the ongoing, offshore blockade of Vietnam, carrier-based aircraft like this Skyhawk maintained surveillance at sea and provided air support.

operating from tenders anchored at Cam Ranh Bay on the Vietnamese coast, joined the watch. Eventually land-based aircraft from Cam Ranh and Thailand relieved the seaplanes. With their ability to cover vast expanses of ocean, surveillance aircraft proved essential to the detection of infiltrating trawlers.

After planes signalled the approach of an infiltrator, Market Time's surface ships took over. A radar picket ship or minesweeper usually comprised the outer barrier of ships in each of the eight sectors, with their patrols extending out to 40 miles. These ships acted as both patrol and command ships for the task force.

However effective the picket ships were in deterring infiltration, they could not handle the surveillance at the surfline because of their deep draft and insufficient numbers. In mid-1965, the staffs of Naval Advisory Group, Vietnam, Seventh Fleet and Pacific Fleet recommended that U.S. patrol craft supplement an inner barrier previously formed by Vietnamese Navy coastal units. The Navy chose two patrol craft—the U.S. Coast Guard's 82-foot cutter (WPB) and a 50-foot commercial boat designated PCF for Patrol Craft, Fast.

Market Time commanders deployed most of the cutters along the Demilitarized Zone and in the Gulf of Thailand. Organized as Coast Guard Squadron One, the initial 17 WPBs sailed from Subic Bay in the Philippines after being shipped from the West Coast. Refueling while underway in the South China Sea, the squadron gained valuable experience in operating from an offshore base in this first cruise. Deployed within a month after deployment to the Gulf, the squadron pioneered in new command and basing procedures. The cutters operated entirely at sea, replenishing spent stores from their command and support ship in the Gulf. While initial Market Time procedures elsewhere dictated the rotation of command ships every three weeks, Squadron One's "mother ship" stayed on station for months. Market Time commanders soon recognized the value of knowledge of coastal traffic and its seasonal patterns that was gleaned from extended experience in a specific patrol area. These command and support procedures became a model for future operations.

Several reasons prompted the selection of the cutters. They had a relatively shallow draft, moderate speed, and were the smallest craft that could berth and mess crews on board. Outfitted for search and rescue, they already possessed sophisticated communications equipment, facilities and crews capable enough to coordinate operations. As for combat itself, the little cutters had a stable platform necessary for gunfire. Before deployment to Vietnam, each WPB exchanged her forecastle-mounted 20mm gun for an over-and-under .50-caliber machine gun/81mm mortar. Developed in the early 1960s after the Navy recognized that its patrol craft lacked punch, the over-and-under allowed cutters to illuminate targets, bombard the enemy ashore and effectively damage steel-hulled ships. In addition, the cutters mounted four machine guns aft. With a full load and a crew of two officers and nine enlisted men, the 70-ton cutters drew 6½ feet and churned the coastal waters at 17 knots.

Assigned to the inner-barrier patrols, meanwhile, the

TOP: With an ancient weapon more common to the navies of the Roman Empire, a sailor fires a flaming arrow at a bamboo hut concealing a Viet Cong bunker. MIDDLE: Shallow-draft navy patrol boats were essential to block Viet Cong infiltration through the maze of canals that intersected the Mekong Delta. ABOVE: From the deck of a high-speed river patrol boat, the U.S. Navy's brown-water sailors engage enemy targets ashore with machine-gun and 40mm grenade fire.

22-ton, aluminum-hulled PCFs—commonly called "Swifts"—proved to be the workhorses of Task Force 115. Designed originally for supplying offshore oil rigs in the Gulf of Mexico, the Swifts performed commendably along the Vietnamese seaboard. Although they lacked the cutter's endurance, platform stability, sophisticated communications and overall size, the Swifts drew only 4½ feet and could run down sampans with their 22-knot speed. Armed with the same over-and-under mortar/machine gun, as well as two additional .50-caliber guns, Swifts effectively handled the burden of coastal traffic surveillance. Organized into boat (later coastal) divisions and squadrons, the Swifts were deployed during the summer of 1965 along with the cutters.

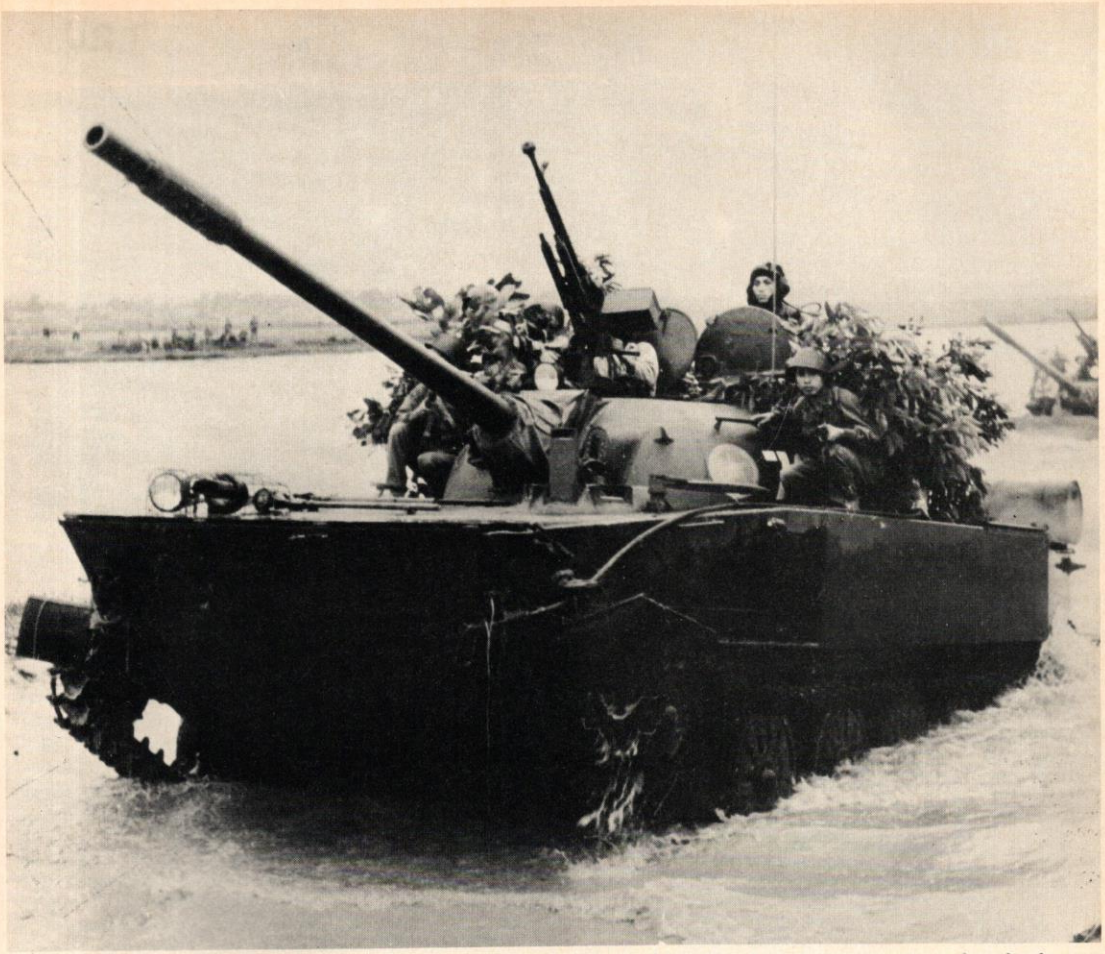
To improve firepower as well as detection, larger patrol craft augmented Market Time units beginning in early 1967. Adding to the initial Coast Guard presence, Squadron Three, composed of high-endurance cutters (WHEC), was deployed in the spring of 1967. Its larger cutters were equipped with search radar, 5-inch gun, mortars and machine guns. To supplement this firepower, three Patrol Gunboats (PG) joined Operation Market Time for varying lengths of time during 1967 and 1968. Although plagued by maintenance problems, the shallow-draft, heavily armed PGs also contributed to halting seaborne infiltration.

As the tempo of the war heightened, demands for additional shallow-draft patrol boats grew. Beginning in July 1966, Task Force 115 evaluated Patrol Air Cushion Vehicles (PACV) modified for coastal surveillance. The speedy "Monsters," as the Viet Cong called them, barely scratched the surface of the Communist-held Plain of Reeds as they scooted along in Long An Province, eliciting abundant praise from U.S. Army evaluators. Unfortunately, the PACVs, like the hydrofoil gunboats deployed later in the war, were too unstable and mechanically complex for coastal operations.

With the first elements activated in June 1966, the harbor defense and surveillance units of Operation Stable Door formed an inshore barrier against infiltration and sabotage, to augment Market Time patrols. Mobile Inshore Undersea Warfare Surveillance (MIUWS) units secured major ports like Cam Ranh Bay, Vung Tau, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang and Vung Ro. The MIUWS units operated from picket boats, Boston whalers and personnel landing craft, receiving direction from harbor-control posts equipped with surface-search radar and with radio communications.

To complement the American effort, the Vietnamese Navy operated shoreline and sea patrols. Absorbed into the Vietnamese Navy in July 1965, the Junk (renamed Coastal) Force scrutinized inshore and river traffic in the Mekong Delta. Organized into coastal groups that initially operated from 28 bases, this force used both powered and sail junks. Assigned primarily to patrol the surfline, they also supported amphibious landing by ground forces. The Vietnamese Sea Force placed ships under coastal zone commanders, who then coordinated operations with Task Force 115 through the five coastal surveillance centers at Danang, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang, Vung Tau and An Thoi. Although the surveillance centers functioned effectively to organize Market Time patrols, duplication of effort was often unavoidable and sometimes strained Vietnamese-American relations.

In addition, in 1967 the Australians renewed their long-time association with the U.S. Navy by joining Market Time, as well as other naval operations, with their surface ships. Until September 1971, the Royal Australian Navy deployed three guided-missile destroyers, each operating on a six-month basis with Task Force 115 to provide added punch in naval gunfire-support missions. Underwater



Ironically, North Vietnamese amphibious tanks were used inland at the battle for Khe Sanh but were never used in the thousands of miles of South Vietnam's waterways for which they would have been very suitable.

ordnance teams, the first Royal Australian Navy combat units deployed to Vietnam, assisted the MIUWS harbor-defense teams.

After March 1965, the war fought by the different surveillance units followed a distinct pattern. Market Time units detected no infiltrating trawlers until December 1965, then engaged seven during the next 18 months, but detected none from July 1967 until the Tet Offensive in early 1968. The search for Viet Cong junks along the shoreline followed the same overall pattern as trawler detection, but varied seasonally because of the monsoons.

To support its larger number of main-force units deployed in the South, North Vietnam sent seven trawlers southward between December 1965 and July 1967. On New Year's Eve, 1965, the USS *Hissem* forced an infiltrator to abandon her mission of dropping off munitions on Ca Mau Peninsula. In May 1966, the task force destroyed another trawler off the coast of An Xuyen Province. The dramatic *Point League* incident, was followed by a December contact in which a trawler aborted her mission. On January 1, 1967, another ship battled her way to the coast, only to disappear after being rocked by three explosions. Finally, Market Time units destroyed two additional steel-hulled ships in March and July of that year.

North Vietnam obviously learned from its failures. Coastal surveillance units detected no other trawlers until the Tet Offensive. Only when faced with the emergency of the 1968 offensive did the North resume its infiltration efforts. It sent five trawlers with urgently needed ammunition and supplies to ground forces locked in bitter fighting. Of the five dispatched, Market Time units destroyed two, turned two others back to sea, and forced a fifth trawler's crew to scuttle. After these Market Time engagements in 1968, coastal patrols did not detect another North Vietnamese trawler for 16 months.

Although coastal junk traffic expanded similarly in the 18 months after the *Hissem* incident, the monsoons dictated both the numbers of fishing craft active in coastal waters and the scale of the surveillance effort. After initial deployments in mid-1965, the commanders of cutters and Swift boats soon found that inspections and detentions rose and fell with the monsoon seas. At the peak of that year's surveillance activities in August 1966, Market Time units boarded 23,578 junks, detaining 138. Once the northeast monsoon churned the seas along most of the Vietnamese coast, however, junk traffic and attendant inspection efforts diminished markedly. In November 1966, patrols boarded only 9,440 junks, detaining just 44.

INNOVATION WAS KEY TO THE MEKONG DELTA

With nearly a third of Vietnam lying in the Mekong Delta, the riverine patrol and assault forces stationed in the Delta's myriad waterways played a major bur not too widely known role in the defense of South Vietnam for Communist aggression.

For here was a vast area in which rivers, even drainage canals, served as major "highways" for friend and foe alike. Few real roads managed to snake along or around those waterways or the rice paddies and swamps that stretched endlessly by the square mile. And the monsoon season usually wiped out those roads not already cut at key points by the ever-present Viet Cong. From headwaters in the high country of Tibet, the Mekong flows for 12,000 miles to the China Sea. It forks in Cambodia at Phnom Penh. The south fork runs out to sea. The north fork splits again as it flows through the delta country and fans out over 26,000 square miles.

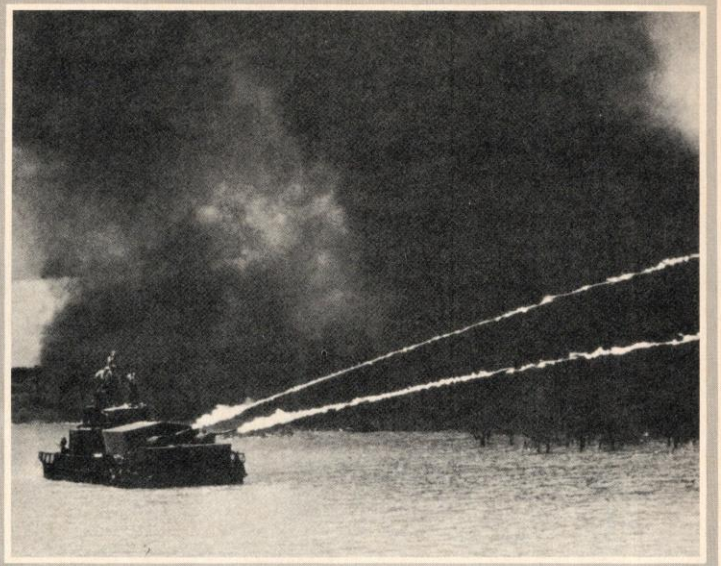
In all, it has been estimated that 90 percent of southern Vietnam's traffic plyed the waterways rather than *terra firma*. The accompanying estimate is that 50,000 junks were the Delta's primary "vehicles"—and some would be supplying the VC insurgents.

Because of the delta's importance, a U.S. Army-Navy task force was organized—the Mobile Riverine Force. Stateside training was conducted at Coronado Naval Base in California, and the unit was operational by June 1967. It included elements of the 9th Infantry Division and the Navy's Riverine Assault Force, along with some SEAL teams. Later, South Vietnamese troops were employed in the unit. the force was highly mobile and could travel up to 150 miles in a day, quickly launching ground attacks from any mooring along the way.

The close-in coastal and river patrols augmenting Operation Market Time's blockade mission resorted to an innovative, assorted fleet of old, makeshift craft or brand-new, experimental boats in the effort to maintain control of the Delta waterways and their traffic.

The Americans emulated the Colonial French, on the one hand, by using modified landing craft of World War II vintage and, on the other, tested ultramodern, air-cushion Bell SK-5 "vehicles" that could rip across rice paddies at high speed. The latter posed maintenance problems, while the old WWII landing craft often were in a state of disrepair.

Both had their uses, however, and so did various other craft supporting the riverine war. Among the latter were 24 river monitors, or gun boats, that in actuality were converted Mk 6 mechanized landing craft. A later generation of 42 up-gunned monitors supplemented the first two dozen that were employed.



An armored "Monitor" (named after its Civil War predecessor) uses flamethrowers to destroy enemy ambush sites in the Mekong Delta.

Then, too, converted LCM (6) hulls produced the river war's Armored Troop Carrier (ATC), a craft capable of transporting troops, jeeps, field artillery and supplies. Some ATCs boasted a steel helicopter "pad" over the forward well deck, while others, outfitted with extra fuel tanks, acted as floating refueling depots that extended the range of their charges.

A "mini-ATC" drawing only a foot of water and operating at speeds up to 28 knots could deliver as many as 20 troops behind enemy lines.

Other craft included Command and Contol Boats (CCBs) as floating headquarters; a series of floating barracks and supply vessels called Mobile River Base (MRB) and 31-foot, fiberglass river patrol boats (PBRs) that operated silently by twin waterjet at high speed and in as little as three feet of water.

Still another innovation was the creation in the Mekong Delta of an entire island as a base for the patrol craft of Operation Game Warden. The artificial island was dredged and built by the U.S. Navy's Construction Battalions, know as the Seabees—in work overcoming VC sabotage efforts that sank three of the Seabee hydraulic dredges.

River warfare was as dangerous as it was effective. Often, the craft had to maneuver in tight quarters—sometimes traversing narrow canals. They often were subject to attack from the banks. In one such situation, Seaman David G. Ouellet, of Navy River Squardon 5, was forward machine gunner on a river patrol boat making a high-speed run along the bank of the Mekong River. Ouelllet spotted an incoming enemy granade and, leaving his protected gun position, ran the full length of the boat, pushed the boat captain to safety, and absorbed most of the blast. He died instantly. In another incident, Boatswain's Mate James E. Williams, was boat captain and mission commander of a two-boat patrol on the Mekong. The craft were fired upon by two enemy sampans. Williams ordered the fire returned, killing the crew of one sampan and forcing the other to take refuge in a tributary of the Mekong. Chasing the Sampan, Williams' patrol was ambushed from shore and ran into a force of two enemy junks and a flotilla of sampans. Williams ordered the patrol boats' searchlights turned on and moved in to press a counterattack. During a pitched battle that lasted three hours, 65 enemy boats were lost or destroyed. Williams and David Ouellet received the Medal of Honor for their actions.

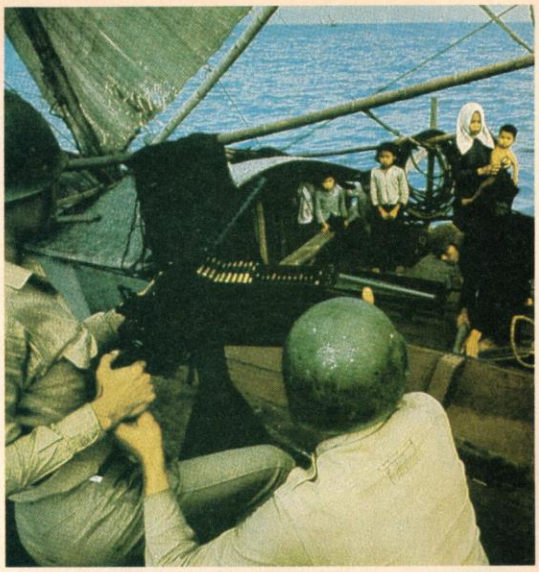
Although coastal infiltration followed the same monsoon cycle, Viet Cong efforts intensified until mid-year, then decreased as trawler infiltration slowed. Detentions during the month of July topped the 1966 peak, while those in November dropped below those a year earlier.

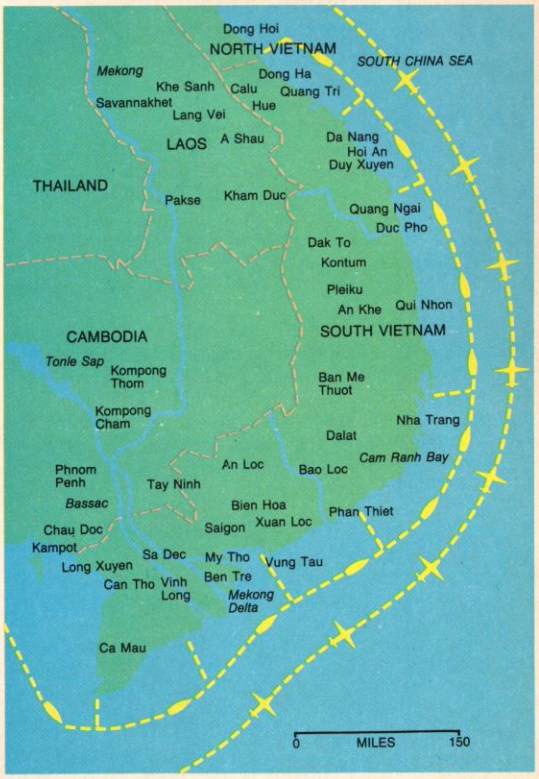
As guardians of the coast, the cutters and Swifts performed numerous tasks. In addition to their anti-infiltration patrols, they conducted most of Market Time's search, gunfire support and psychological warfare activities. The most routine patrol often resulted in pursuit of evading craft and hostile fire from boat or shore—PCF-18 experienced such a patrol in January 1967. After sighting a sampan and five accompanying basket boats heading toward the beach south of Danang, the Swift closed on the evaders, only to draw heavy-weapons fire from shore. The evading craft beached safely, but a reconnaissance aircraft overhead observed enemy fire from a network of trenches on the beach. The spotter plane directed fire from the Swift's mortar while awaiting airstrikes. Fifteen Viet Cong were killed in the action.

Often task-group commanders organized special search operations, cordoning off a stretch of coastline, stringing a barrier out to sea, or boarding every transitting craft in a designated expanse of water. Likewise, gunfire support came in many forms—adding punch to land operations conducted by U.S. or Vietnamese units, responding to a call from reconnaissance aircraft that spotted enemy targets, or answering a request from besieged bases or villages ashore. Some were urgent fire requests, such as those by U.S. Army Special Forces and their "Mike" Forces fighting Phu Quoc Island's determined Viet Cong; others were pre-planned missions, such as those in support of Marine Corps amphibious operations near the Demilitarized Zone. Swifts and cutters plied the coastal waters, hunting for downed pilots, naval and merchant seamen cast overboard, even wounded Viet Cong. The patrol craft also engaged in psywar operations, distributing information or playing recorded messages as they sailed along the coastline.

If the war failed, Operation Market Time succeeded. Although the North intensified its use of the Ho Chi Minh Trail and the neutral port of Sihanoukville, Cambodia, Market Time units prevented the seaborne infiltration of ammunition and equipment into South Vietnam. Through successful surveillance of the coastline from the Demilitarized Zone to the Cambodian border, they prevented the resupply of Communist main-force units in the South. Among the best lessons learned during Market Time's first three years, naval commanders found that surveillance aircraft proved themselves essential for patrolling the vast expanses of ocean. At the surfline, aircraft worked with patrol craft in combat as well as in reconnaissance roles. Market Time sailors also learned that sophisticated patrol craft requiring frequent maintenance often proved unsuitable for combat in the seas along Southeast Asia. More simply and solidly constructed patrol craft performed well. But most importantly, the sailors of Market Time's U.S. Navy, Coast Guard and allied units performed superbly. Under the most difficult conditions, battling unpredictable monsoon seas or unrelenting sun and heat, confronting both the danger and the boredom of patrolling, they did their job. □

Vietnam veteran and U.S. Navy historian Clarence E. Wunderlin, Jr., former editor of the George C. Marshall papers, is working on the third volume of the official history of the Navy's role in the Vietnam War. As suggested readings, Volume II of The U.S. Navy in the Vietnam Conflict, *by Edward Marolda and Oscar Fitzgerald and* A Short History of the U.S. Navy in Southeast Asia *by Edward Marolda.*





TOP: Part of Operation Market Time was the search of junks and sampans to halt infiltration of arms and supplies to the Viet Cong. ABOVE: During the 1960s, ocean supply lines to Viet Cong positions—right up to the surfline—were effectively blocked by coordinating air, sea and forces. The patrol craft also performed other tasks, such as rescue, information-gathering, and broadcasting propaganda to the enemy via on-board speakers. On all counts, they succeeded.

PIPPER ON HIS TAILPIPE

If MiGs were hurting bomb runs by the F-105 "Thud," F-4 Phantoms would fake it as bomb-loaded 105s.

By Louis M. Durkac

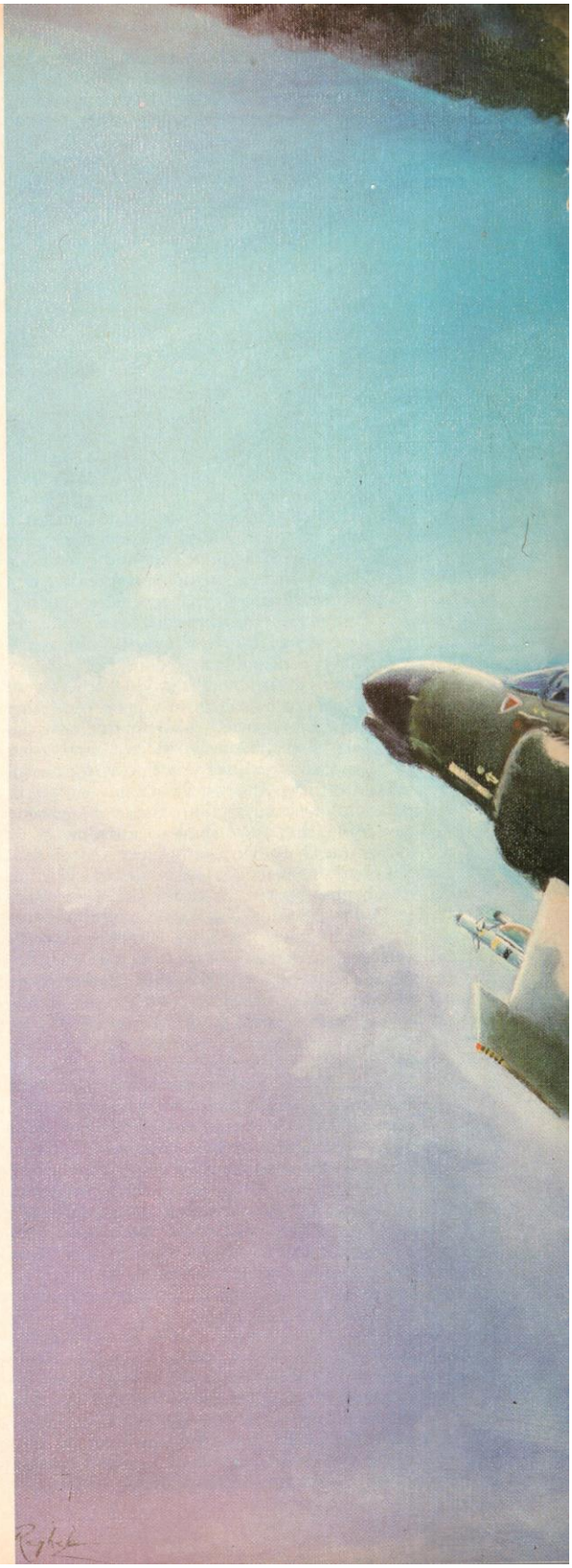
When the United States decided to bomb North Vietnam in early 1965, the objectives were to inhibit the flow of men an materials from North to South Vietnam and to punish the North for its aggression against the South. American military planners produced a list of some 94 targets which should be hit immediately, using the principles of the offensive, mass and surprise, to effectively and severely cripple the North's war-fighting capability.

But Washington insisted upon its own guiding principle—gradualism. By slowly escalating the bombing, the policy-makers felt, they could put increasing pressure on Hanoi to stop its aggression. Instead, the North built up its defenses and dispersed its assets across the country.

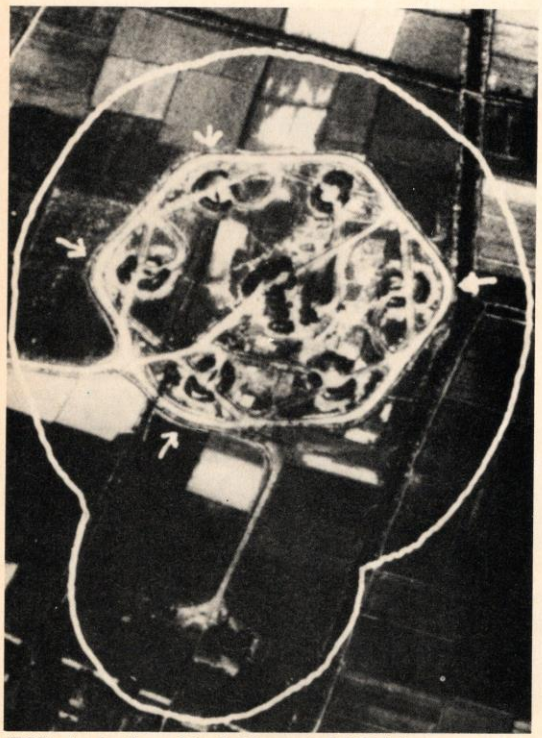
And gradualism had a deadly meaning for American aircrews flying missions over North Vietnam. In the beginning it allowed only certain targets to be hit—two of the off-limits targets were the airfields housing Hanoi's Russian-built MiG interceptors and the launch pads for SAM (Surface-to-Air Missile).

With everything possible done to minimize civilian casualties, targets deemed too close to Hanoi or Haiphong were off-limits, and American fighter-bomber crews had to fly strictly defined routes in and out of the target area. If the weather was not good enough to *see* the target, the aircrews had to abort the mission and come home, only to return the next day to try again. Unfortunately, these rules cost many an American pilot's life.

It would take a highly versatile aircraft to satisfy the exacting criteria. The B-52 would be highly accurate and effective, but would be too vulnerable to the deadly SA-2 SAMs littered across North Vietnam. Moreover, the B-52's Strategic Air Command had its own war going on in neighboring Laos. The aircraft for North Vietnam had to be fast on the deck, with sufficient range to make it into the North and back at high speed. The logical choice was the Republic F-105 Thunderchief, or "Thud" as it was better known.



This combat painting, entitled Victory Over North Vietnam, *is by artist Ahmed Ragheb and appears courtesy of the U.S. Air Force Art collection in the Pentagon. At right, a Communist MiG-21 fighter goes down in flames as a U.S. Phantom F-4 streaks by in triumph.*



TOP: As deadly as North Vietnam's MiG fighters were its surface-to-air, or SAM, missles—which shot down many U.S. aircraft during the Vietnam War. ABOVE: by 1972, North Vietnam possessed over 300 SAM emplacements, clustered like this site (in a U.S. Air Force reconnaissance photo) among positions outside Haiphong Harbor.

The "Thud" was a high-speed, low-altitude fighter-bomber. It carried enough fuel to sustain the speed necessary to get in and out of the target area in a hurry. "Thuds" usually went up North with a load of bombs, external fuel tanks and a heat-seeking Sidewinder air-to-air missile. The 105 also housed an internal 20mm multi-barreled gun. A top speed of Mach 1-plus at sea level further enhanced its survivability. The F-105 made more strikes against North Vietnam than any other US aircraft. It also suffered the most losses.

The North Vietnamese, in the meantime, utilized the U.S. policy of gradual response to build up a highly sophisticated triad of air defense consisting of SA-2 SAMs, 87mm and 57mm AAA (antiaircraft artillery) and ground-radar directed, Russian-built MiG-17 and MiG-21 interceptors.

Early in the war, AAA (called "triple-A") and SAMs took their toll on the U.S. aircraft. The Americans, however, quickly developed ECM (Electronic Counter Measures) and sent in special F-105 "Wild Weasels" configured with Shrike missiles which guided on the radar from the SAM sites. The rest of the strike force then had a better chance of getting to the target in one piece, since the SAM radars either shut down to avoid being fired upon or were destroyed. By mid-1966, the North had ordered its precious MiGs into the air to hamper the intensive U.S. bombing effort.

The MiG-17, while highly maneuverable, packed only a triple 23mm cannon for aerial fighting and was never more than a nuisance to a well-coordinated F-105 strike "package." Although some "Thuds" were lost to MiG-17s, the more deadly obstacle was the MiG-21.

The MiG-21 "Fishbed," developed by the Soviet Union as an interceptor, was an excellent dogfighter, with good acceleration and a high rate of turn. It carried the ATOLL heat-seeking missile (an almost exact replica of the U.S. AIM-9 Sidewinder), along with an internal, twin-barrel 23mm cannon.

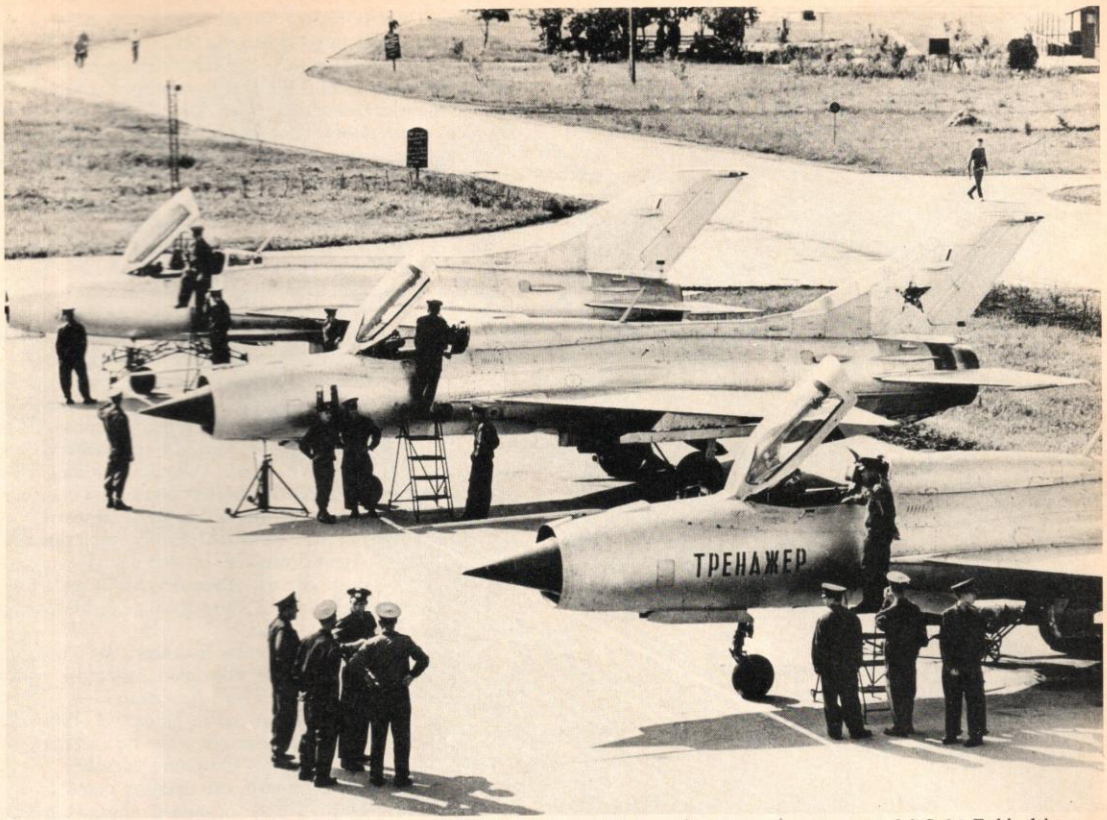
Recognizing the MiG-21 as a very real threat to the F-105 strike force, the Ameriacns now sent in their McDonnell-Douglas F-4C Phantom IIs as fighter escort to engage any MiGs sent up to intercept the 105s.

The Phantom was the U.S. multi-role fighter and could be used as an air-superiority fighter or as a fighter-bomber. Deemed an even-to-superior match for the MiG-21, it carried both heat-seeking Sidewinder and radar-guided Sparrow missiles, but its designers had decided to delete the gun from the F-4's list of armament.

While flying MiG CAP (Combat Air Patrol) on April 26, 1966, an F-4C shot down the first MiG-21 victim of the war. The North Vietnamese hadn't been flying the MiG-21 for long, and after this encounter seemed reluctant to intercept the 105s when they had F-4 escort. By the end of 1966, the North had only 15 Mig-21s at its disposal—all to be used most sparingly.

The North knew the rules the United States placed upon itself, the U.S. media having reported the restrictions to the American (and world-wide) public. Armed with this knowledge, the North concentrated its SAM and AAA defenses along the mandatory air routes and near the allowed target areas. Many "Thud" drivers were shot at from "hospitals" and dams, but could not shoot back, due to the restrictions. If F-4s accompanied the 105s on their strike, the MiGs stayed on the ground and couldn't be touched. In those cases, the North relied more heavily on SAMs and AAA to knock down the 105s. (The ground fire was reduced while the MiGs were airborne due to the very real possibility of accidentally shooting one down.)

If the F-4s stayed home, the MiGs came up in force. The F-105 couldn't defend itself while loaded with tons of



Supplementing the slower and less powerfully armed MiG-15s and MiG-17s, after 1965, the supersonic MiG-21 Fishbed became the primary interceptor aircraft of the North Vietnamese Air Force.

bombs—if attacked, the "Thud" pilot would "clean" his jet of bombs and external fuel tanks in order to engage the attacking MiGs. By this time, however, the MiGs would be in retreat to their bases or to the sanctuary of the nearby Chinese border, and the bombless "Thuds" would be unable to complete their bombing run.

In this way the MiGs could accomplish their mission without actually staying around to dogfight with the "Thuds." If, on the other hand, the "Thuds" refused to jettison their loads when attacked, the MiGs would pounce on their less-maneuverable foes and knock down a few. Thus, the decision to jettison was a necessary one—although it meant the target absorbed a few less bombs that day, it at least ensured the survival of a highly trained pilot and a valuable aircraft.

MiGs did periodically attack the "Thuds" when they had F-4 protection, and during the months of July through December 1966, four more MiG-21s were shot down by USAF F-4s. But such encounters were all too rare. The U.S. 7th Air Force wanted to badly maul the North's MiG-21 force once and for all, to help the "Thuds" go into the North unmolested by enemy air attacks. But any riposte planned had to stay within the arbitrary rules of the conflict.

On December 22, 1966, the 7th Air Force assigned its Operation Bolo to Colonel Robin Olds, commander of the 8th TFW (Tactical Fighter Wing) at Ubon, Thailand. The objective: to destroy the airborne forces of Communist North Vietnam.

Colonel Olds had only been the 8th TFW commander since September of that year, but he brought with him a can-do aura accumulated since his World War II flying days. He was the son of Maj. Gen. Robert Olds, and after graduating from West Point in 1940, Robin Olds entered the Air Corps. He quickly downed 12 German aircraft while flying P-38s and P-51s. He was an avid proponent of fighter aircraft who inspired the "fighter pilot" spirit in the younger men of the Wing who looked up to his leadership and experience.

Colonel Olds knew the only way to destroy the MiGs was to get them up in the air, engage them—and deny them access to their airfields or to China for sanctuary. He also knew the MiGs had a tendancy to avoid encounters with the F-4s. He somehow had to trick the MiGs into the air and then shoot them down.

Olds decided that two wings of F-4Cs would participate in Bolo. He would lead the West Force, which would simulate a "Thud" strike into North Vietnam and cover the two western MiG airfields. East Force, composed of 20 aircraft from the 366 TFW at Danang in South Vietnam, would orbit over the two eastern MiG bases to deny landings. East also would cut off escape routes into Red China to the east.

The possibility of SAM and AAA activity led Olds to request radar-jamming ECM pods for all aircraft involved in the operation. The strategem added to the trap, since up to this time only the F-105s had carried the ECM pods. To further enhance the survivability of his crews, Olds was authorized the use of 24 "Thuds" which would suppress enemy ground defenses.

TOP: Although not supersonic, the highly-maneuverable MiG-17s of the North Vietnamese Air Force were a potent threat to U.S. bombers. MIDDLE: The F-4 Phantom, used by the Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps, was the MIG killer of the Vietnam war, downing some 107 enemy aircraft. ABOVE: Hanoi's crack MiG pilots were both trained and advised by Moscow. Here, Soviet Air Force Major N.P. Burkov dicusses fighter tactics with three such trainees, who will later run up against U.S. F-4 pilots.

Intelligence reports confirmed that the North's early-warning network routinely had the MiGs already airborne and orbiting, waiting for the "Thuds" to pass by on their way to the target area. If the MiGs were up when the F-4s reached their home airfields, there would be no escape for the Vietnamese pilots. They would have to fight. Olds had no intention of losing. He was sending 56 Phantoms after a force of 15 MiG-21s. He wanted the mission to be a complete success, but he also wanted every one of his boys to come home in one piece.

The F-4 was capable of firing its radar-guided missiles BVR (Beyond Visual Range). This meant the F-4 could shoot down another aircraft beyond eyesight. The obvious problem with this system was that a radar scope didn't know friend from foe, so one rule of the war was to *visually* identify an aircraft as an enemy before shooting at it. The visual procedure usually placed the F-4 craft close to the minimum range of the radar missile, however, and thus tended to defeat the missile's original purpose. Olds would send 16 F-4s in flights of four into the alien airspace as the first U.S. aircraft in North Vietnam that day. This meant anybody else airborne was unfriendly, and no visual sighting was necessary. If the MiGs were airborne and waiting as predicted, the F-4s would simply target them on radar and knock them down one by one before ever getting within "eye-shot" of each other. Any MiGs remaining could be dispatched with the shorter-range, heat-seeking Sidewinder missiles.

After the initial engagements, however, the "missile-free" environment would be cancelled, since the battle area would soon be saturated with American F-4s.

Olds set the date of execution for January 2, 1967. He kept it a secret until December 30, when he and his staff chose the aircrews. Twice a day between December 30 and January 1 they were briefed in excruciating detail on the use of the ECM pod, the on-board threat-warning receiver, the geography of the route, enemy ground defenses, MiG capabilities and limitations, air combat tactics to be used against the MiGs, rules of engagement, radio procedures and so on. On the morning of January 2, 1967, Operation Bolo went into action.

At 0600, however, the weatherman briefed some very bad news—weather in the target area was solid undercast, with tops estimated at 7,000 feet, the ceiling below unknown. Several problems surfaced immediately. Airfield MiGCAP wouldn't work if the good guys couldn't see the airfields. The weather would also allow the MiGs to hide from the Phantoms once the trap was discovered, using the ground radar-controllers' help in finding their way through the cloud deck. But for the Americans there was no turning back now.

There were more briefings to follow: code words, intelligence, take-off and join-up procedures, a review of the overall plan, and a final Wing briefing by Colonel Olds. At 0730 the individual flights of four split up for their inter-flight briefings, and at 12:25 p.m., Olds flight, led by Robin Olds and his GIB (Guy In Back), Lieutenant Charles Clifton, were airborne and winging their way to North Vietnam.

The Phantoms took off in flights of four, one flight every five minutes. Colonel Olds figured that a Phantom at full afterburner would have about five minutes of dogfight time before reaching BINGO fuel (the fuel state at which the aircraft must leave the area to make it to the refueling tanker before running out of gas). Entering the battle area in five-minute increments would allow the F-4 force about 35 minutes of constant presence, with each successive flight replacing the previous one.

West Force, using F-105 call signs, formations and tac-

In addition to the North's SAM missiles, another vital factor in the air war over the enemy's territory were more conventional antiaircraft weapons like this machine gun which were particularly effective against low-flying aircraft.

tics, entered North Vietnam from the west and turned southeast towards Phuc Yen, the primary MiG airfield just outside of Hanoi. Following Olds Flight, were Ford and Rambler Flights, five minutes apart. Olds soon flew over Phuc Yen heading southeast. No MiGs. He turned his flight around and flew back over the airfield heading northwest. Radar contact—12 o'clock low with a high closure rate. The unidentified aircraft flew below Olds Flight, staying in the undercast. Something was wrong. Where were all the MiGs?

Unknown to Colonel Olds, the North Vietnamese weren't expecting a "Thud" strike. The 105s usually didn't strike in bad weather, and those in charge of the MiGs were convinced they'd either turn back or not come at all. When U.S. fighters did appear, there were no MiGs in the air as expected—it took the enemy pilots extra time to get airborne. This truly was a surprise attack. Unfortunately it was neither intended nor desired to be exactly that.

Meanwhile, Olds Flight had again turned around to fly over the airfield heading southeast. Ford Flight was now entering the area, and Colonel Olds cancelled the missile-free environment to avoid shooting down a friendly. Suddenly, without warning, MiGs began popping up through the undercast in all quadrants. Ford Flight called a MiG-21 closing on Olds Flight at its 7 o'clock. A hard left turn sandwiched the MiG with Olds 2 rolling out in his 6 o'clock, as Olds 1 spotted another MiG at 11 o'clock heading straight for him. He hurriedly flipped his switches to lock the enemy on radar and let go with two missiles. The closure rate was too great and the MiG came within the minimum range before the missile would guide. Olds 1 quickly swung around and unleashed two Sidewinders as the MiG disappeared into the clouds, spoiling the missiles' guidance again.

"As I closed on the MiG that evaded in the cloud deck, I had another in sight at my 10 o'clock, in a left turn, and just above the clouds," Olds would explain later. "I then turned my attention to the second MiG. I pulled sharp left, turned inside him, pulled my nose up about 30 degrees above the horizon, rechecked my missile switches and ready panel, switched fuel to internal wing transfer, barrel-rolled to the right, held my position upside down above and behind the MiG until the proper angular deflection and range parameters were satisfied, completed the rolling maneuver, and fell in behind and below the MiG-21 at his 7 o'clock position at about .95 mach [550 knots]. Range was 4,500 feet, angle off 15 degrees. The MiG-21 obligingly pulled up well above the horizon and exactly sun down. I put the pipper on his tailpipe, received a perfect growl, squeezed the trigger once, hesitated, then once again. The first Sidewinder lept in front and within a split second turned left in a definite and beautiful collision-course correction. I did not take my eyes off the first Sidewinder and consequently did not see precisely what the second missile did. It appeared, to my peripheral vision, to have guided also. The first missile went slightly down, then arced gracefully up, heading for impact. Suddenly the MiG-21 erupted in a brilliant flash of orange flame. A complete wing separated and flew back in the airstream, together with a mass of smaller debris. The MiG

"The B-52 (seen here would be highly accurate and effective, but would be too vulnerable to the enemy MiG fighters and deadly SAMs positioned across North Vietnam." It was not until late in the war that B-52s went into action over Hanoi.

swapped ends immediately, and tumbled forward for a few instants. It then fell, twisting, corkscrewing, tumbling, lazily toward the top of the clouds. No pilot ejection occurred above the clouds."

While Robin Olds was dispatching his MiG, Olds 2, operated by pilot (Lieutenant) Ralph Wetterhahn and back-seater (Lieutenant) Jerry Sharp, launched two Sparrows against the MiG they had sandwiched at the start of the melee. The first missile malfunctioned, but the second scored a direct hit on the MiG-21, sending it into a flat spin, slowly rotating like a falling leaf, until it too disappeared into the clouds trailing black smoke.

Olds 3 had a MiG at 6 o'clock that apparently was preoccupied with achieving a tracking solution on the Phantom. Olds 4 pulled up and over the MiG-21 and fell into perfect firing position behind him. One Sidewinder later and the tally thus far was Phantoms, 3, MiGs, 0.

Ford Flight was right behind Olds Flight and had MiGs all around, as well. The MiGs were attacking in pairs, one pair coming up through the clouds in front of the flight while two more emerged behind. The two in front were to distract the ambitious F-4 drivers while the trailers snuck up behind to shoot.

Colonel Daniel "Chappy" James, a flamboyant and well-liked flight leader, was Ford 1 on this day. He caught sight of two MiG-21s at his 10 o'clock and was preparing for the kill when his back-seater called MiGs at 6 o'clock. "He [the back-seater] was screaming so loud and insistent-like, I thought I'd better look back, so I whip quick-like into a roll to the right, and sure enough there sat the prettiest "21" you ever saw, in near-perfect firing position on . . . (my Number 4). I immediately called a hard right break for Three and Four, figuring the MiG would go with them and this would put me in perfect position to have him . . . (and I'm also breaking right harder 'n hell) that MiG broke *left* and *up* and came canopy-to-canopy with *me* (near midaired us) . . . He yanked that "21" around so hard he near stalled out and slid right down in front of . . . (my Number 2), who was inside the turn and near line abreast with me. I called . . . "take him," and he said "got him!" . . . the MiG pulled out just above the cloud tops and started a tight left, slightly climbing turn. I remember thinking at the time we're too close and too many G's, when . . . [Number 2] went into a big ole barrel roll and settled right back into perfect position. I think the MiG driver must have thought then that we had overshot and was wondering where we were, as . . . [Number 2] promptly let fly one Sidewinder which knocked his tail half off. The MiG pitched up sharply and burst into a big fireball."

Rambler Flight was in hot pursuit of a flight of four MiG-21s heading for China when a lone "21" showed up on the flight's tail with cannon blazing. The flight broke left, overshot the MiG (who followed his buddies to China), and Rambler 1 and 2 spotted two MiGs slightly below them at 12 o'clock in perfect "missile-soaking" position. They both let missiles fly and scored hits on the unsuspecting jets.

Rambler 4 had no difficulty tracking a MiG he'd spotted at his 2 o'clock. He suspected the MiG was approach-

ing a position to attack Ford or Olds Flights a short distance ahead. The MiG broke left in front of Rambler 4. After a minor re-position and radar lock, a Sparrow missile impacted in the MiG's tail-pipe area, followed by a fireball and parachute.

The mission was considered to be highly successful. Seven MiG-21s were confirmed destroyed, and three were observed diving into the clouds with missiles following them. Their fate was unknown.

As with many a well thought-out plan, things did go wrong. The MiGs did react as expected, but not as quickly as hoped. The weather had convinced them to stay on the ground that day. The weather also hampered the other missions as well. East Force had no contacts, since no MiGs took off from any air bases other than Phuc Yen. The entire air battle took place within 15 miles of that airfield and lasted only 13 minutes. The remaining MiGs had either fled through the clouds to China or had dived into the undercast and landed at Phuc Yen. Hence no further contacts were made by the follow-on flights of West Force. The F-105s brought along for defense supression were unable to complete their mission due to the weather. With no suppression available, the ECM pods proved invaluable because the SAMs and AAA fired at the exiting F-4s failed to guide on them.

In actual battle numbers, "Bolo" pitted 12 F-4C aircraft against 14 MiG-21s. In one 13-minute period, the USAF destroyed 44 percent of the enemy's top-line fighter force, without losing a single friendly aircraft.

But the shooting was not yet over. On most mornings before an F-105 strike, the USAF usually sent an RF-4C (an unarmed reconnaissance version of the F-4C) into North Vietnam to check the weather. The MiG-21s, hurt from "Bolo," now were hitting the RF-4s especially hard, since they didn't shoot back. The American HQ in Saigon figured that if a feint worked once, possibly it would work again. On the 5th and 6th of January (three days after "Bolo"), two F-4Cs loaded for bear flew the normal route taken by the RF-4C. They flew in tight formation so that the enemy radar would only show a single return.

On the 5th no MiGs came up, but on the 6th, Crab Flight painted a four-ship of MiGs coming up at them at 12 o'clock. Crab 1 locked-on and fired a Sparrow at the lead MiG-21, which promptly fireballed.

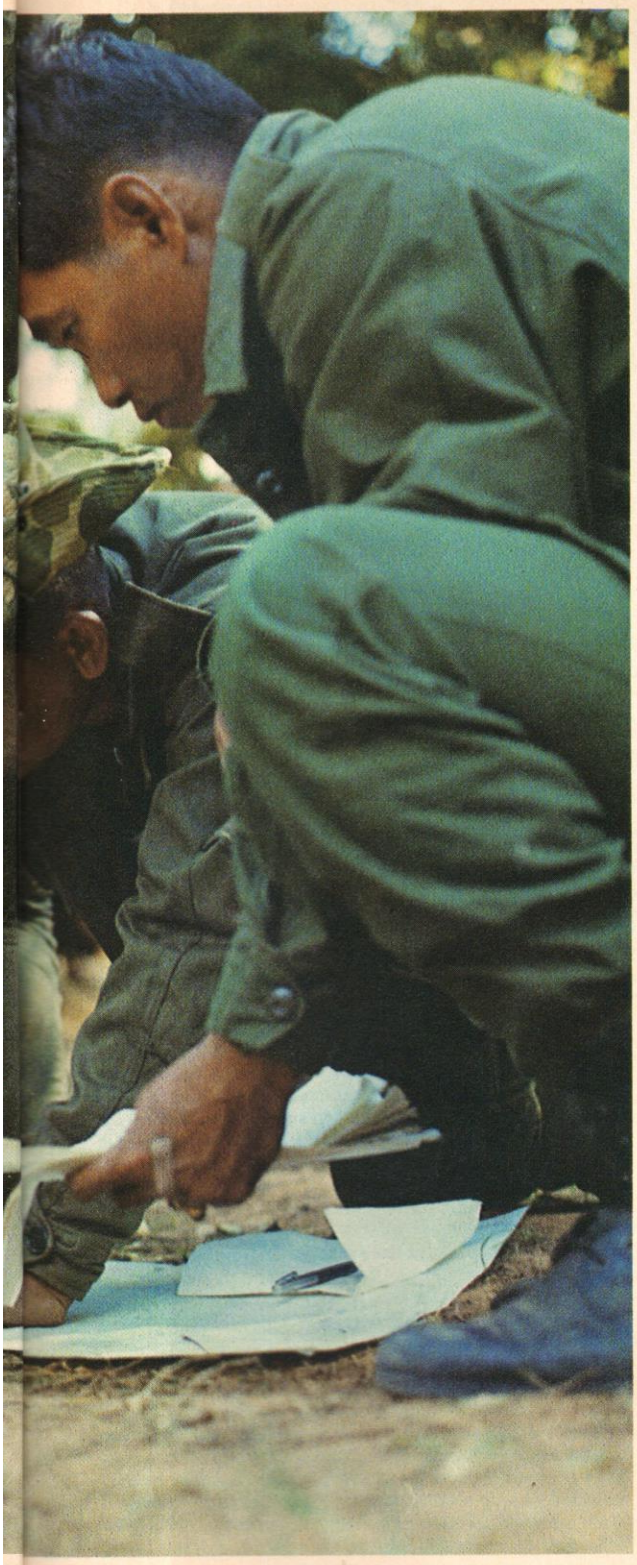
After scaring the second MiG away, Crab 1 turned to help Crab 2, who was busy with two MiGs of his own. Crab 1 shot some Sidewinders at one of the MiGs, which promptly turned tail and left his companion to fend for himself. Crab 2 fired a missile at the remaining MiG. Its pilot, probably still flustered from the effects of "Bolo," pulled back on the stick so hard that his MiG went out of control. He ejected before his craft hit the ground in a spin. New total, 9 Mig-21s confirmed, 3 probable.

Since the North only started with 15, it's no wonder the MiG-21s maintained a low profile for several months. It wasn't until the end of April that the North's MiG-21 pilots built up their confidence enough to engage the F-4s again in aerial combat. Even though the airborne forces of North Vietnam were not totally destroyed as planned in Operation Bolo, they were mauled badly enough to allow almost three months' worth of air strikes to go into North Vietnam with their aircrews feeling a bit more secure. □

Louis M. Durkac, a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, does his own piloting in the "hot" F-16 as an Air Force captain. Suggested readings: Fighter Aces of the USA, *by Trevor J. Constable and Raymond F. Toliver;* . . . And Kill MiGs, *by Lou Drendel;* The Air War Over Vietnam *by Bernard C. Nalty, Jacob Neufeld and George M. Watson.*

TOP: Marine Phantoms in flight. The versatile F-4, in its "C" configuration, was chosen for an escort that would counteract the threat that MiG-21s posed to the strike force of F-105s. MIDDLE: "Thuds" *usually went up North with a load of bombs, external fuel tanks and a heat-seeking Sidewinder air-to-air missile," such as these two. Sidewinders accounted for 59 MiGs. ABOVE: Colonel Robin Olds led his 8th Tactical Fighter wing in the "fighter sweep" against the MiG-21s over Hanoi on January 2, 1967.*

Training of Vietnamese Civilian Irregular Defense Forces (CIDG), shown here making a map reconniassance, was one of the main reasons for the Special Forces camp at Song Be.



GUERRILLAS IN THE MESS HALL

The Green Berets arriving at Song Be weren't happy with the American compound. Before they could react, however, the Viet Cong struck.

By Shelby L. Stanton

When Lieutenant Colonel Alton E. Parks and his U.S. Army Special Forces control Detachment B-34 were ordered to the provincial capital Song Be northwest of Saigon in April 1965, the casual observer might have deemed their deployment a good deal safer than the unit's previous battle station of Kontum in the western highland mountains near Laos. Not only was Song Be the capital of Phuoc Long Province, that is to say, a real town, but it sat within comfortable proximity of several South Vietnamese divisions.

Until 1964, the American Green Berets had operated in wild and wooly "frontier" territory for the most part. Starting in 1964 and 1965, however, the jungle-warfare specialists found themselves caught up in the growing "Americanization" of the Vietnam War and working more often with the fast-expanding conventional forces pouring into the country. No longer were the Green Berets associated strictly with Ranger-like strikes or fortified "strategic hamlets" out in the middle of nowhere. They remained "irregulars," but they took on new missions beyond their founding concept as a special-warfare force. One of these new missions was to provide advisory support for South Vietnam's native-run pacification efforts on district, or even provincial level.

And so the men of control Detachment B-34 arrived at Song Be in mid-April of 1965—and their battle-wise eyes did not light up with approval for the "accomodations" established earlier by the American advisors of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), at the provincial capital. Not at all.

The Special Forces control team members found the compound of MACV's Advisory Team 94 at Song Be to be located next to the provincial governor's walled villa. The compound had tennis courts, a water tower, barbecue pits, a modern kitchen and mess facility, even separate officer and enlisted buildings. All very nice—but the defensive situation was very unsatisfactory.

The Special Forces troopers decided to entrench their

One of the factors that made casualties so high in the Vietnam War was the widespread use of field fortifications on both sides, such as this sandbag bunker seen in 1964 with a U.S. Special Forces soldier atop it, the South Vietnamese flag at left.

own positions on a nearby hill that offered better protection. However, they were obligated to stay in the established American post while their hilltop facilities were being built.

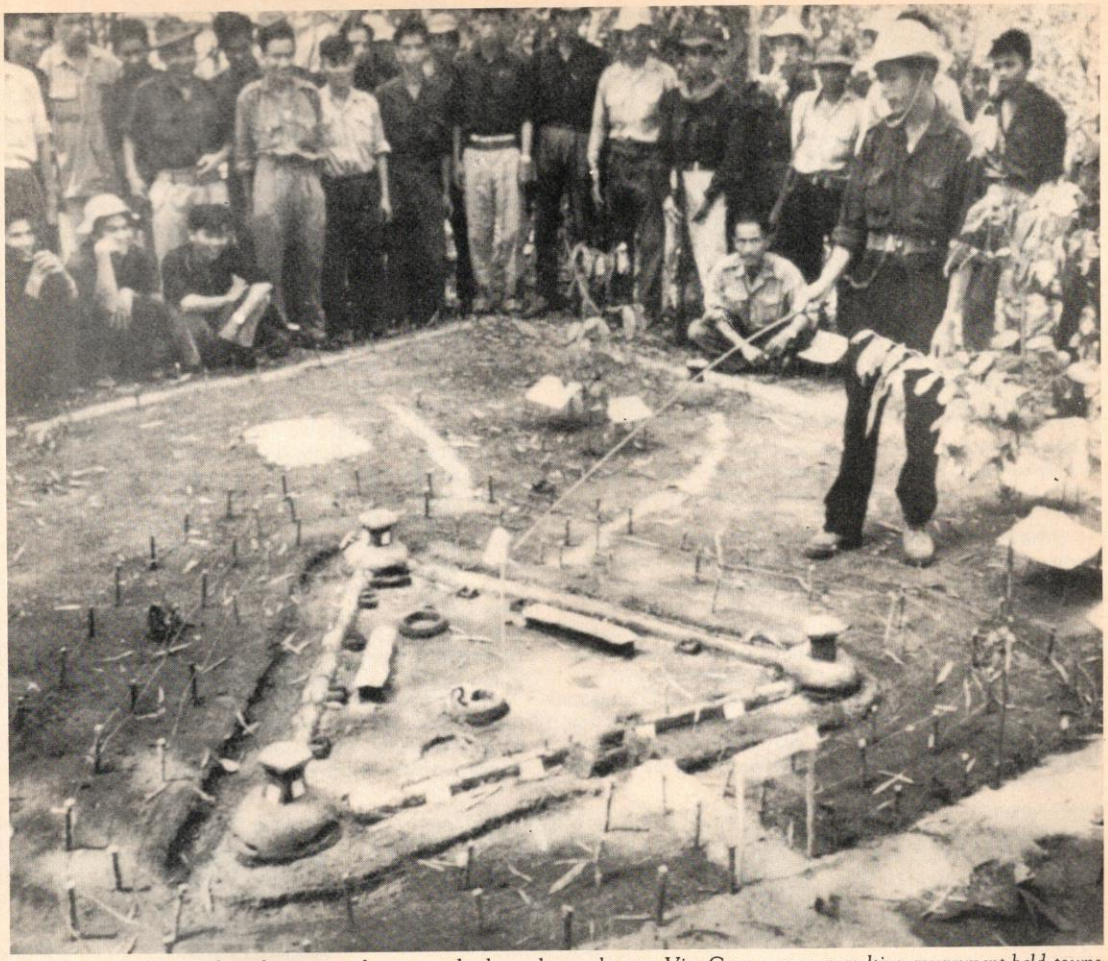
The executive officer of Detachment B-34, Major Mitchell A. Sakey, realized their safety depended on the strength of the existing MACV compound until the hill fort was finished. He knew that the atmosphere around Song Be was deceptively tranquil, since the town was located midway between the major Viet Cong bastion of War Zone D and the Communist logistical headquarters just across the border inside Cambodia. The Viet Cong depended on secret supply routes passing through or near Song Be. Green Beret Major Sakey's combat intuition warned of VC temptations to attack the city before its U.S. garrison became too strong.

He immediately began constructing a 60mm mortar pit and two .30-caliber light machine-gun nests. One Browning Automatic Rifle and three grenade launchers were added to the small arsenal, and all the Special Forces troopers were armed with new M16 rifles. The new weapons were positioned to cover the partial brick wall and fence that formed the outer perimeter, and an ammunition trench was dug in front of the buildings.

On May 9, a Viet Cong soldier, Duong Van Duc, who was armed with a 7.62mm SKZ Russian weapon, surrendered to government authorities. He stated that certain officers of his 763d VC Regiment recently had spent several days atop Nui Bara Mountain surveying Song Be. On the afternoon of the next day, May 10, another Viet Cong, Nguyen Van Ton, was captured. He stated he was part of the same regiment and confirmed that some sort of action was probable, but he also said no one knew when or in what strength.

Just before supper on the evening of May 10, the South Vietnamese province chief became extremely nervous. He was convinced that the VC would try to overrun Song Be after nightfall. The joint MACV-Special Forces compound beside his home contained only 36 Americans, but many of them dismissed his concern as over-exaggerated fear. At the same time, the entire garrison was put on 50 percent alert, just in case.

The Viet Cong announced their assault with a concentrated mortar barrage in the early-morning darkness of May 11, apparently unaware of the improved Special Forces weapons or their positions. The preliminary mortar shelling pounded Song Be and caused considerable destruction within the American compound. But the newly



Attention to fundamentals such as prior planning and rehearsal were keys to Viet Cong success assaulting government-held towns and other fortified strategically important areas. Here a briefing is held using a scale model.

emplaced machine guns and mortar were not targeted—they would be able to deliver effective fire against the later waves of Viet Cong assailants.

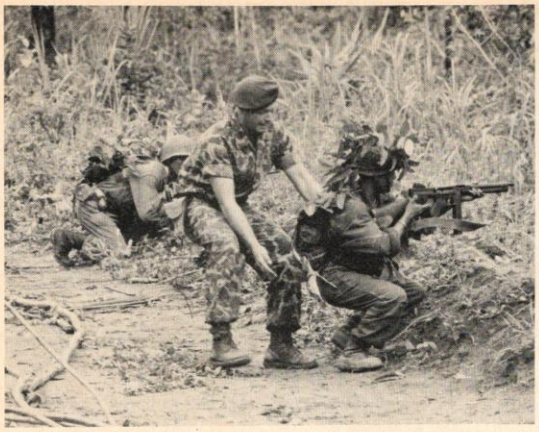
The main VC assault was made by the reinforced 761st and 763d Regiments, with a combined strength of 2,500 soldiers. These regiments surged through the thin barrier of 36th ARVN Ranger Battalion positions in front of the town. The Viet Cong advanced through withering defensive fire and took over the central market and temple districts before smashing into the American compound.

The two buildings which housed the American advisory contingent were pummeled by mortar and recoilless-rifle fire. Sergeant Richard S. Bartlett's room took a direct hit, and he was thrown out of bed and wounded. Lieutenant Colonel Parks was also wounded in this opening barrage, and Sakey assumed command. In the initial confusion, however, there was little overall control as the Special Forces sergeants automatically tried to reach their preassigned posts.

Sergeant Charles D. Crockett had just finished his tour of perimeter guard and had been in his room only 15 minutes when mortar-fire explosions began erupting through the camp. He quickly grabbed his M16 and a pistol and ran towards the 60mm mortar located outside, about 30 feet behind his room. On his way, Crockett rounded the brick wall and saw Sergeant Horace M. Young, Sergeant Bartlett, and Specialist 4th Class Amos E. Watson. Young, screaming at everyone to stay down, was watching for VC trying to penetrate the rear fence. Suddenly, a seven-man Viet Cong demolitions team dashed into view—the Special Forces soldiers gunned them down.

The VC opened up with 57mm recoilless rifles in the darkness, and the resulting direct hit blasted the cluster of Americans down into a hole behind the wall. Although stunned, they were otherwise unhurt. "Let's get out of this hole before we're all killed!" Young screamed, and the Special Forces soldiers split into two directions. Sergeants Bartlett and Young manned the light machine-gun nest, which covered the compound's critical southwest corner.

At the same time, Sergeant Crockett and Specialist Watson jumped into the 60mm mortar pit, which was behind the machine gun, and began firing as rapidly as they could. Crockett dropped the shells down the tube as Watson frantically pried open wooden cartons of fresh ammunition. The mortar was at the end of a three-foot deep trench connected to the ammunition bunker. Sergeant-Major Robert Frander and Staff Sgt. Aldege A. Martin defended the shallow trench itself, covering both the machine gun



Throughout the early part of the war, American U.S. Special Forces men such as this one, Sergeant Stanley Harold, served as "advisors" to their South Vietnamese counterparts.

and the mortar with their rifle fire, and passed fresh munitions down the trench. Martin already had been wounded in the first mortar barrage, but he nonetheless stayed at his crucial position.

This defensive arrangement blocked the VC from reaching the interior of the compound from the southwest direction. Viet Cong mortar crews shifted their fire to strike the newly discovered Special Forces weapons. After ten minutes a close mortar hit rained debris over the machine gun. The crew yelled they were hit, and Young told Bartlett, who was now badly wounded, to try to make it to the rear. As Bartlett crawled toward the trench, Sergeant Daniel F. Crabtree joined the Special Forces defenders in the ditch. He ran out and dragged Bartlett back to a makeshift aid station set up at the end of the mess hall building. Sergeant Young stayed at his machine-gun position until he was wounded a second time and the machine gun jammed.

With no helpful flare ships overhead, the night was pitch dark. The Viet Cong temporarily stopped trying to overrun the southwest section and now used bangalore torpedoes to breach another hole in the fence near the buildings. In minutes they raced through the ruined barbed wire unopposed—they then were able to start throwing grenades at the trench and mortar from the rear.

Sergeant Crockett saw a Chinese stick grenade sailing through the air at him. The resulting explosion mangled his hand. Another grenade landed at his feet, but fortunately it was a dud. He was able to catch two more grenades and throw them back in the direction of the enemy. More and more grenades showered the trench and mortar pit. Specialist Watson was desperately gathering more ammunition from Staff Sgt. Martin in the trench when a grenade landed between them. Martin turned the ammunition box to shield him, but was badly wounded as the brilliant flash lit the trench. Watson was killed instantly.

Crockett only had three more mortar rounds left, but he couldn't fire them off because he was busy trading grenades with the Viet Cong around the corner of the American billets. The Viet Cong also moved up some 40mm rocket-propelled grenade launchers into a nearby South Vietnamese barracks they had occupied and began to blast directly down the trench. The deadly combination of grenades and rocket fire wounded everyone several times, and Crockett lost both his rifle and his pistol.

IN DEFENSE OF THE FRONTIER TERRITORY

Throughout the Second Indochina War, the U.S. Army's Special Forces served as the advance guard of American assistance in South Vietnam's more remote border provinces, and many of these untamed regions contained active Viet Cong recruiting centers along with large Communist base camps.

South Vietnamese governmental authority was usually limited to heavily guarded provincial capitals and a few scattered outposts carved out of surrounding jungle or trackless marshlands. These fortified garrisons were linked to the rest of the country by aerial resupply or by travel along unsecured roads, often impassable in monsoon weather—and always subject to VC ambush.

The American Special Forces campaign to save Vietnam's frontier territory from total VC domination was waged by a handful of professional 12-man A-Teams and 24-man control B-Detachments. These highly trained and proficient jungle-warfare experts waged a brutal struggle against Viet Cong guerrillas long before the massive American military buildup in Vietnam. The Special Forces detachments normally were under-gunned and under-manned (and sometimes even lacked higher command approval), but their relentless determination and ability to lead native contingents saved many contested areas during the early 1960s.

General William C. Westmoreland began to utilize his Special Forces troops in a more conventional defensive posture during 1964. In November, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), gave the 5th Special Forces Group additional responsibilities well beyond its special-warfare role. One of these group tasks was advising South Vietnamese pacification officials and police forces in outlying towns where other U.S. presence existed. The A-Teams previously assigned to district advisory missions now were designated as sub-sector advisory teams, while their controlling B-Detachments, working on the province level, would be categorized as sector advisors.

The Special Forces did not have the intrinsic combat capability to fulfill the increased burden of security duty. The Viet Cong regiments that prowled the border countryside were equipped with modern automatic weapons and fresh manpower. These powerful VC formations became increasingly capable of attacking

An abattis improvised from sharpened bamboo and a "moat" of pungii stakes forms a ring of protection.

Crockett was now weaponless, but tried to defend his position by having the other three sergeants toss him grenades from out of the ammunition bunker. In turn, he pitched the baseball-size fragmentation grenades at the Viet Cong. He later recounted that the only way he could tell the difference between the enemy and friendly grenades being thrown at him was the fact that the VC grenades sizzled and sparked as they came in. Finally, Crockett was forced to abandon the mortar and crawl back down the trench, which was littered with dud Chinese stick grenades. The four wounded sergeants formed a huddle and prepared to die together. They only had two working rifles and a pistol left.

Although the southwest corner was still in American hands, the VC had breached the perimeter in several other places and the fighting was now general throughout the compound's maze of buildings, walls, vehicles and tents. Private First Class Joseph Ward, who was stationed in Song Be as part of the supply section for the 120th Aviation Company, was firing his M14 rifle through a hole in the wall at Viet Cong sappers.

Sergeant Crabtree told Ward that Viet Cong were coming through the fence where the South Vietnamese were supposed to be, and to intercept the infiltrators around the mess hall. Ward ran between two billets and found himself face to face with four Viet Cong. He managed to get off one round before his rifle jammed, and was shot in return. Ward lost consciousness and did not wake up until dawn. He felt numb all over and could not move. When he was finally found in the morning, he was laid next to the badly wounded Colonel Parks.

Sergeant First Class Curtis Chancy of MACV Advisory Team 94 was asleep when the mortar barrage started. He tried to reach his machine-gun position with Lieutenant Henry A. Deutsch, but was hit in the face by a mortar explosion. In the shock of battle, he did not realize he had been partially deafened. Chancy went into the communications shack and grabbed a flashlight to see the extent of his injuries. Blood kept pouring into his eyes, so he dashed to Sergeant William D. Benning's makeshift aid station in the mess-hall dining room. Wounded men were everywhere. Chancy yelled at Benning, "How come you're not set up?"

"We didn't have time!" Benning screamed back. Sergeant First Class Foster Ray arrived with a medical kit, and Chancy bandaged Lieutenant Deutsch, who was suffering from a back wound. Since normal electrical power had been disrupted, all work was done by flashlight. Sergeant Young, who had been burned and badly injured at the light machine-gun position, was also in Benning's aid station. He was helping to tear bandages from cloth with a 3-inch pocket knife.

Chancy slowly became aware that his hearing was starting to fail as he asked the whereabouts of American Sergeant Shelby Green.

"He is hurt, he's in the kitchen," Sergeant Benning said as he took over Deutsch's treatment. Chancy went into the darkened kitchen and found his man, who had been hit in the shoulder. Chancy strained to see the severity of wound by using an improvised candle of burning paper that he lit from the water heater's pilot light.

Suddenly Viet Cong soldiers came in through the mess hall door and started firing. Sergeant Benning shot one dead with his pistol, but both he and Lieutenant Deutsch were quickly killed in the exchange. Sergeant Young stabbed several VC with his 3-inch pocket knife and then crawled into the store room, where he died from loss of blood. A Vietnamese interpreter ran down the building's corridor shouting, "VC in mess hall!"

Seeing government-held towns and villages as a threat to their plans to control the countryside, the Viet Cong kept them under an almost constant state of attack.

Filling sandbags was one of the war's more boring and tedious—but necessary—duties, due to their ability to stop incoming enemy rounds. When the VC attacked the MACV camp at Song Be, however, sandbags worked both ways.

South Vietnam's regular army and ranger battalions. Every Special Forces team compound, even those in the larger cities, was subject to potentially devastating rocket and mortar barrages or to sudden Viet Cong sapper raids.

The reinforced sector B-Detachments operating within provincial capitals were fairly secure, since the South Vietnamese placed their more reliable units in such politically important locations

Normally, these were safe situations—but in Vietnam, *normally* was not always the norm.

This was the kind of fighting Parks and his men expected to find at Song Be. Instead, they found a plush layout that was a nearly indefensable maze of buildings, walls, nooks and crannies.

The deafened Sergeant Chancy could not hear the warning, but he saw shots being fired in the next room. He grabbed his wounded companion's new M16 and pulled the bolt back, but could not get the rifle to fire. Green tried to tell him how to operate the weapon, but Chancy was having great trouble hearing now. He finally gave up trying to work the rifle and pulled the other man with him to another room. He closed the door and crawled over to Captain John Miller. "Let me have a weapon," Chancy said, and the captain handed him a 12-gauge shotgun.

Both Green and Chancy retreated through the building onto the patio at the other end of the mess hall. There, Master Sgt. Robert E. Gabe was firing at VC running through the compound from behind the barbecue grill. The Viet Cong opened the rear door and rolled two grenades across the screened-in porch. The sergeants shot the VC grenadiers in the doorway as the grenades went off. Sergeants Gabe and Chancy were badly injured in the blast. "Let's get out of here!" Gabe screamed and tore through the wire screen. Gabe had been hit in the legs and head, but still managed to move four steps to a wall of sandbags which several officers were defending.

When Specialist 4th Class Johnie K. Culbreath heard the fire fight raging inside the mess hall, he attempted to help evacuate wounded soldiers. He charged courageously toward the rear door, but the Viet Cong killed him as he approached the captured aid station. Culbreath fell dead on the steps. Air Force Captain Lynch saw the mess hall door open slightly. He fired his carbine through the wooden door and killed a Viet Cong, who fell back inside. The rest of the VC who occupied the mess hall were killed in the morning as they tried to escape from the compound.

The four Special Forces sergeants in the southwest ammunition trench were still holding their positions as armed U.S. helicopters arrived overhead. The Viet Cong continued to try to eliminate this remaining strongpoint despite the arrival of aircraft. The dense smoke and close nature of the combat prevented any real air support inside the compound itself. However, the helicopters were able to bomb and strafe several VC artillery positions on the ridges overlooking Song Be from the west and stopped most of the recoilless-rifle and mortar fire.

Major Sakey was everywhere during the battle as he tried to hold out until daylight. After the loss of the medical supplies in the mess-hall skirmish, his biggest problem was keeping the growing number of wounded alive. Nearby VC machine guns repeatedly drove off landing attempts by the medical evacuation helicopters. Finally, air strikes silenced these menacing positions, and the Viet Cong retreated back into the hills. At 8 a.m., the first medevac helicopters roared in to lift out the 16 severely wounded troopers. The survival of the American compound was now assured.

Captain Austin E. Miller, a participant in the battle, later summed up the furious action: "At 0130 hours on 11 May 1965, the Viet Cong launched a heavy attack on the province capital of Song Be, South Vietnam. As is usual, a good deal of the effort was directed against the American compound which was one of the key locations in the defense of the province headquarters. 81mm mortars, 75mm pack howitzers, rocket launchers, and satchel charges were used in the assault on the compound.

"The fact that the compound was not overrun or that there were not more American casualties was in a great deal due to the valor and courage of the following men: Lieutenant Deutsch, Sergeant-Major Frander, Staff Sergeant Martin, Sergeant Crabtree, Sergeant Crockett, and Specialist Watson. These men occupied positions in the vicinity of

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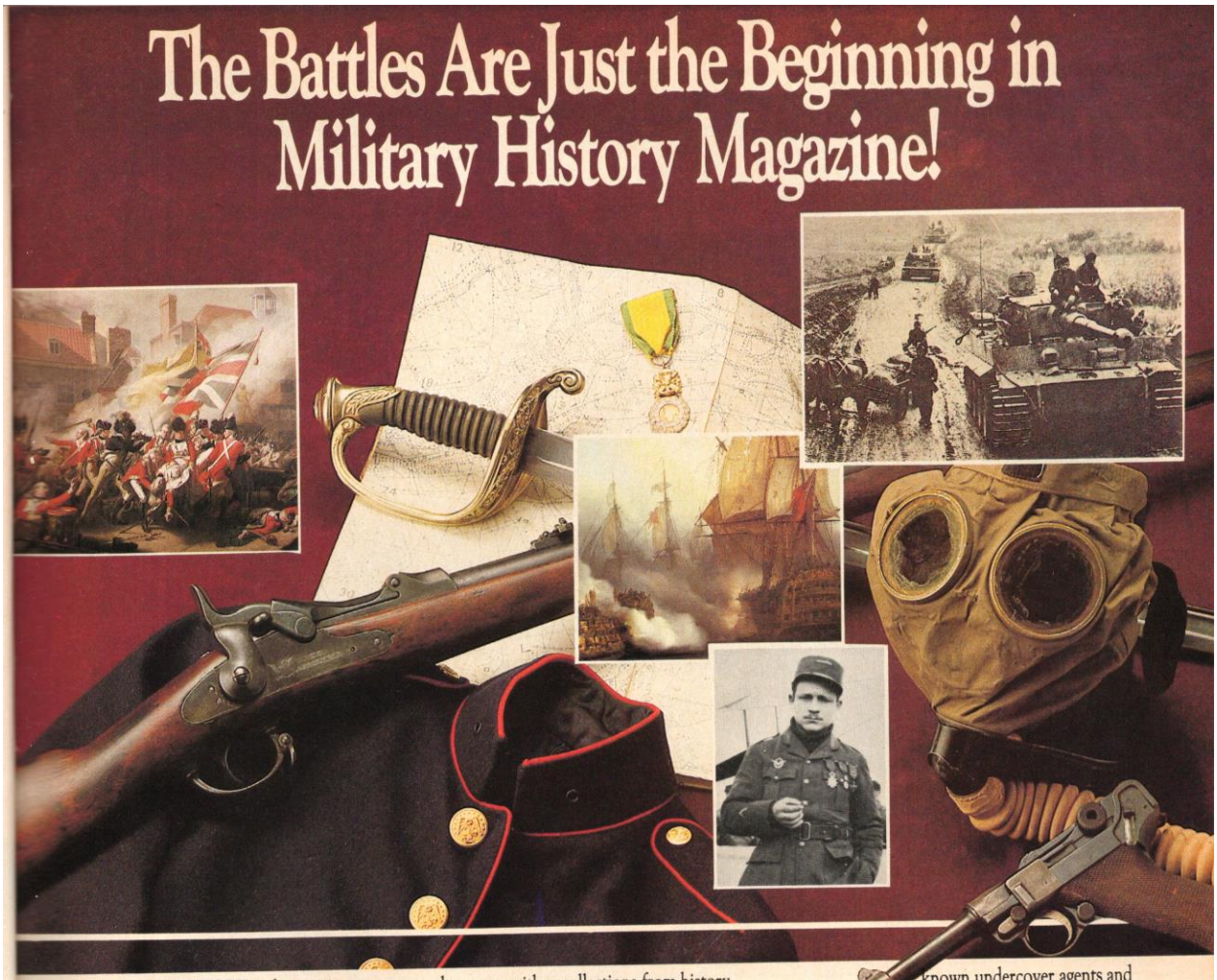

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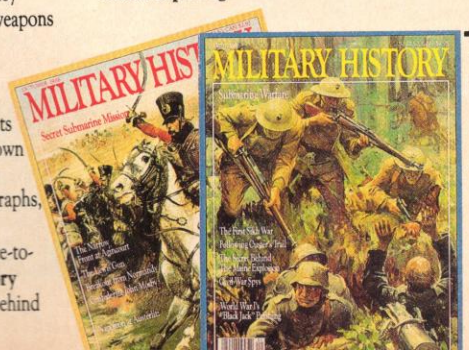

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VNSUM8

By day, the Viet Cong avoided contact with patrolling South Vietnamese military forces and their U.S. allies (seen here traversing a typical rice paddy), but at night in many cases, they were able to operate freely.

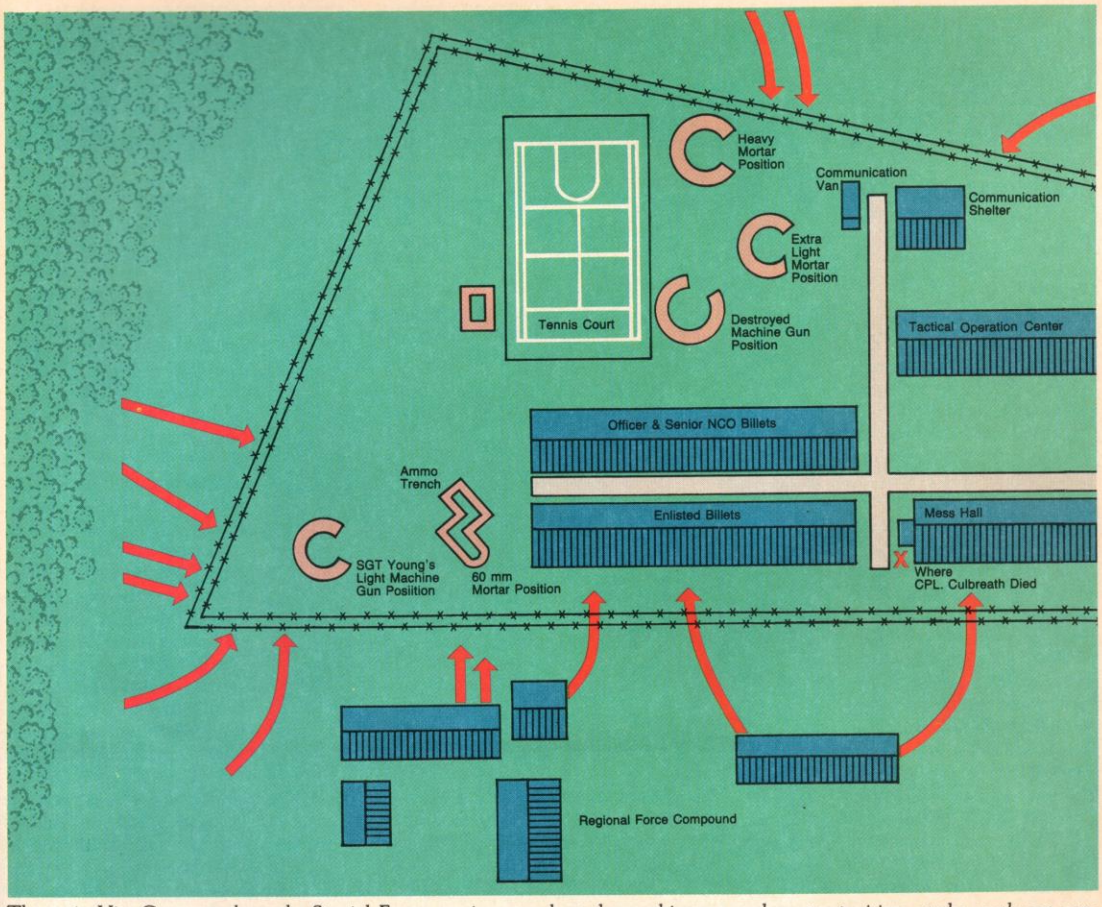
the location where the VC penetrated the compound. The VC penetration occurred through a mutual fence between the American compound and the adjacent South Vietnamese Regional force compound. The VC actually entered behind the positions held by these men. If they had been able to use this entrance, they could have taken every defensive position in the compound from the rear, thus increasing the casualties suffered by the Americans.

"The first indication that the VC were in the compound was when these men began to receive fire from their rear and flanks. The VC penetration occurred through a mutual fence between the America compound and the adjacent South Vietnamese Regional Force compound. The VC were able to grenade the Americans from covered positions. In a tactical sense the position could have been justifiably considered untenable, and the men could have withdrawn without censure. They chose to remain. This sector was the key to the compound defense, and they bore the brunt of the attack."

The Viet Cong were unable to completely capture the provincial capital because of the valiant Special Forces defense of the joint MACV camp at Song Be. But main fighting in the town itself continued. The 36th Ranger Battalion was reconsolidated and attempted to push the Viet Cong out of their entrenched positions in the center of the city. One hasty charge aimed at liberating the market and temple sectors was repulsed, and the Ranger commander was killed. The Ranger battalion, which had suffered heavy losses in the opening attack, became discouraged and refused to move any farther until reinforcements arrived.

South Vietnamese reinforcements were on the way, but the two Ranger battalions sent to relieve Song Be advanced cautiously up the winding provincial highway in a slow march which lasted all day. One of the battalions detected and avoided an elaborate ambush area two miles in length. This discovery, coupled with a brief skirmish, unnerved the South Vietnamese reaction force, and American advisors were forced to urge them onward under a series of close-air strikes.

The Green Berets mopped up their perimeter, collected weapons and assessed damage. With five dead and 16 wounded out of a total force of 36 personnel, they could not do much more than radio in helicopter strikes on remaining enemy positions. However, even this assistance was vital to renewed South Vietnamese attempts to regain the town. The arrival of the 34th Ranger Battalion allowed the 36th Ranger Battalion to assemble enough ground firepower to start clearing the last pockets of VC resistance. Many Viet Cong deliberately died at their positions and refused to abandon certain defenses, although their defeat was now inevitable. This phase of the Battle of Song



The main Viet Cong attack on the Special Forces garrison struck at the machine-gun and mortar positions at the southwest corner of the compound wile supporting attacks came from the north and south.

Be was marked by a slow, methodical elimination of any enemy troops who refused to surrender. Throughout the next day, the Rangers mopped up the last VC positions in the rubble of Song Be.

The intelligence analysis after the engagement showed that the entire 763d VC Regiment had participated. The regiment contained the 707th, 709th, and 711th Infantry Battalions. In addition, elements of the 761st VC Regiment were present. The D-120 Infantry Battalion and a portion of the 235/480th Artillery Battalion supported the attack. Separate local Viet Cong units that reinforced the battle included the C-270, C-127, C-440 and K-58 companies. The Communist forces were armed with 75mm pack howitzers, 75mm and 57mm recoilless rifles, 81mm and 60mm mortars, RPG-2 antitank 40mm rocket-propelled grenades, 12.7mm Chicom machine guns modified for antiaircraft firing, an assortment of .30- and .50-caliber machine guns, as well as 7.62mm Degtyarer Chicom light machine guns, AK47 assault rifles and 7.62mm SKZ carbines, and even U.S. 30-cal. carbines.

The defense of the joint MACV-Special Forces compound at Song Be was significantly instrumental in the eventual victory in this critical engagement. At the same time, the fortitude and courage of this small band of Americans represented a much greater achievement. The battle proved to be one of Saigon's few victories in a spring marked by military defeats in many parts of the country. The failure of the Viet Cong to overrun and capture a provincial capital was not only a severe setback in political terms, but in this instance also prevented their logistical lifeline between Cambodia and War Zone D from being secured.

The U.S. Army's Special Forces also demonstrated its remarkable versatility in assuming a task for which its normal doctrinal training left it unprepared. The ability of Special Forces to survive the hostile circumstances of conventional sector advisory assignments enhanced the prestige of the organization and made it a valuable spearhead of MACV efforts to pacify the border territories. Repeatedly—and not only at Song Be—the Special Forces sergeants and officers proved their determination and capability to upgrade the defenses of threatened regions, and were extremely valuable in extending the reach of Saigon governmental control. Regardless of the eventual outcome of the war, battles like Song Be established the Special Forces as a tactically proficient component of the Army military forces, as well as a viable instrument of U.S. national policy under the most difficult conditions. □

Vietnam veteran Shelby L. Stanton's books include The Green Berets at War, *recommended as further reading on U.S. Special Forces in Vietnam.*

The clear—and familiar—instruction on the Claymore was "front toward enemy."

By Lawrence M. Greenberg

In January 1967, the U.S. 196th Light Infantry Brigade, part of Task Force OREGON, launched operations in Quang Ngai Province against Viet Cong terror squads and irregulars. Centered on the American base camp in Chu Lai, the VC's nightly terrorist attacks had reached alarming levels—something had to be done to protect local villagers and to restrict enemy movement after nightfall.

Part of the American response would be small-unit ambushes and, on January 18th, A Company, 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry, received the order to enter the field and strike back.

Because they could be detonated from some distance away without revealing your position, Claymore mines were a favorite weapon of infantrymen in Vietnam.

That night's mission fell to 2nd Lieut. Truman P. Sullivan, A Company's Second Platoon leader. Sullivan selected his second squad leader, Sergeant Walter R. Nobles, as assistant ambush commander and assembled the rest of the squad. In a few hours the ten soldiers would conduct an ambush along a VC trail near the village of Phuoc An, 16 kilometers south of the Chu Lai complex. Before departing the base camp before dusk, Sullivan briefed his men, checked equipment, radios, and emergency signal flares, and had each man clean and test fire individual weapons: M-15 and M-16 rifles, two M-79 grenade launchers and several .45 pistols.

In addition to these standard infantry weapons, Sullivan added five items that had become synonymous with the fight in Southeast Asia—they were M18A1 "Claymore" antipersonnel mines.

The Claymore was by no means the world's first antipersonnel fragmentation mine, but its versatility and directional fragmentation made it a powerful, and popular, weapon of choice in Vietnam for both defensive and offensive operations. The principle of using mass fragmentation, instead of individually aimed single projectiles, against unprotected infantry has a long history indeed. As long as there has been artillery, cannoneers have recognized the value of using grape shot to cut swaths through advancing infantry. Hand-grenade and landmine technology had progressed enough by the First World War to make both effective antipersonnel and antivehicular weapons, and they were used by the tens of thousands. Development only increased during World War II. Both sides manufactured even more effective, although still non-directional, stationary and bounding antipersonnel mines. The infamous German S.Mi.441(e), or "Bouncing Betty;" the British Shrapnel Mine Mk I, and the American M2 series of bounding mines all exacted heavy personnel tolls in Europe and North Africa.

In the Pacific, Allied armor faced Japanese suicide squads carrying satchel charges. To protect against these human antitank weapons, the U.S. 393rd Heavy Maintenance Company (Tank) fashioned five M2A1 bounding mines into an assembly that could be fastened to the base of tank turrets. Then, if the vehicle were attacked by suicide squads, the mines could be detonated from within the tank. Thirty of these "backscratchers" were assembled in Hawaii and flown to armored units in the Philippines, but official records credit the improvised weapon with only limited success. Not only were these "backscratchers" prone to malfunctions, but the effect of having five 60mm mortars detonate simultaneously on, or very close to, a tank's metal turret proved an unnerving experience for the crew inside.

But these were all non-directional mines, and the massed infantry assaults of the Korean War prompted the Army's Research and Development Laboratories at Picatinny Arsenal to work on a more effective and controllable defensive munition. By the end of the war in Korea, the first controlled-fragmentation Claymores were ready—but they arrived too late in Korea to see any widespread use.

Designated the M18, the first Claymore mine was produced in two variants—one with a molded sight and one without. Both had curved, rectangular bodies of molded fiberglass-filled polystyrene that were concave vertically and slightly convex horizontally, to direct the fragmentation pattern. Two molded arrows on the case showed which side was the front; cloth tabs were attached to its sides for securing it to trees or other vertical supports, and it had three sets of folding metal legs for ground placement.

Inside, the M18 held ¾ pounds of C-3 explosive behind a plastic matrix containing preformed rectangular steel fragments. The mines were detonated with electric blasting caps that were inserted in one or more of its three fuse wells—one on the top and one on each vertical side. The caps were set off

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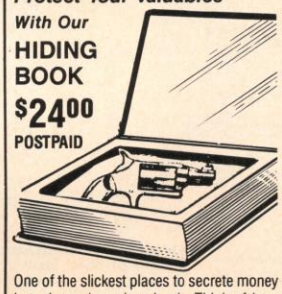

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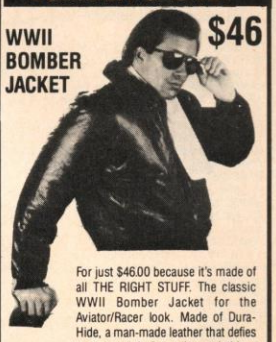

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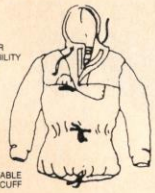

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using a rather primitive plastic and metal firing device that incorporated two 1.5-volt flashlight batteries and a sliding, flashlight-like switch. Reliability and safety problems soon arose with the early device and subsequent manuals suggested that it be discarded in favor of the newer, much more reliable M57 magneto firing device.

"Front Toward Enemy," stamped prominently on the Claymore mine, was one rule the troops were careful to obey.

When American combat troops arrived in Vietnam, a second-generation M18A1 Claymore went with them into the field. The improved mine was slightly larger and heavier than the original and used two folding scissor-type legs for positioning. Two fuse wells atop the mine replaced the original three; an improved molded peep sight became standard, and the molded direction arrows were supplemented with fool-proof directions: "FRONT TOWARD ENEMY" molded in bold letters on its front, and "BACK" likewise affixed on the rear.

But the M18A1's major changes were internal—1½ pounds of C-4 plastic explosive replaced the original C-3, and small steel balls replaced larger rectangular fragmentation. Combining the more shattering C-4 explosive with 700 spherical projectiles produced higher velocities, a more controlled fragmentation pattern, and a much better defensive, as well as offensive, weapon.

The Claymore soon proved its combat effectiveness and versatility. As early as 1966, Army field manuals listed its employment as being "limited only by the imagination of the user." In fact, the mine's versatility was so great that the Claymore was assigned three designations, depending on its mode of employment. When command detonated, to protect a defensive position or in an offensive-type ambush, it was considered a weapon. Yet, since it could be used in an uncontrolled mode using a variety of

tripwire or time-delay fuses, it also was called a mine or booby trap. Regardless of formal designation, the Claymore was a potent device, able to sweep a 60-degree arc two meters high and 50 meters in depth with deadly fragmentation. This was truly a weapon deserving of its namesake, the *claidheamh mor*—the large, double-edged broadswords once used by Scottish Highlanders.

The five M18A1 Claymores that Lieutenant Sullivan took with him on the night of January 18, 1967, had arrived at his firebase packed in a shipping box of six mines. Each mine came individually wrapped in an M7 bandoleer that also contained a hand-held M57 firing device, two M4 electric blasting caps attached to 100 feet of wire, and adapters to fit them securely into the mine. The M57 firing device was a magneto-type generator that produced two pulses of electric power when the operator flipped back a safety latch and swiftly depressed its plastic handle. An M40 test device, used to check continuity, also came packed with the Claymores, one in each box of six mines.

To employ the weapon, a soldier removed it from the bandoleer, spread its two folding steel legs and, while peering through the molded sight, pressed the leg firmly into the ground. If the Claymore was to be used as a command-detonated weapon, the electric blasting caps were checked carefully with the test set, inserted through the cap adapters, and firmly seated into one or both fuse wells on the weapon's top surface. The operator then retired a safe distance from the Claymore, at least 16 meters, and was ready to attach the firing device to the cap wires should he need to initiate the mine. Of course, this is only one scenario and, as the early manual suggests, the Claymore mine could be employed in any number of combinations.

Other popular ways to use the Claymore in the command mode utilized multiple mines connected in series to different firing devices. In this manner, groups of mines could be initiated simultaneously or individual mines could be detonated in quick succession. Either method produced devastating results. Since Claymores could also be detonated with either primer cord or non-electric blasting caps, they also were useful as booby traps. In this unattended mode, non-electric caps were attached to a variety of pull or tension-release firing devices.

Leaving Claymores unattended presented at least two major hazards. The first was that the booby trap might inadvertantly be set off by civilians, animals or friendly forces. The second, more common danger was discovery of the device by the enemy and having the mine removed and used against its "owners" at some later date. As the war progressed, the VC became adept at removing or turning Claymores around so as to face the very positions that they had been installed to protect. By 1969, many American units, both Army and Marine, required they be cemented in place or have their rear surfaces painted with fluorescent paint, if time allowed. In the latter case, if the Claymore didn't shine back at you at night, you didn't fire it.

Lieutenant Sullivan arrived at the ambush site at approximately 8 p.m. and, during the next ten minutes, carefully positioned his men behind two dikes that surrounded a rice paddy. To his west an open trench bisected a small wood that separated the paddy from a tree-covered hill and ended at the southwest corner of the paddy dikes. One kilometer to the south lay the village of Phuoc An. The Lieutenant placed his Claymores at the four corners of the paddy, one facing down

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the trench, and took cover behind the embankment with his men to await the enemy's arrival. They did not have long to wait.

Less than 45 minutes after settling into positions, SP4 Richard A. Jolin, B Team leader, used his Starlight Scope to spot six men walking toward Sullivan's patrol in the trench. Word passed quietly through the squad and the infantrymen, four of whom had never seen combat, readied themselves for the ambush.

As the third VC entered the killing zone, the entire procession came to a sudden halt, as if the insurgents had discovered the ambush. Instead, they spoke quietly, chuckled among themselves, and began to move once again, now just a few feet away from Specialist Jones. Fearing the enemy was bound to discover his position, Jones fired his Claymore.

Seven hundred steel spheres sprayed across and down the trench toward the wooded hill. Almost instantly another mine was fired—the squad saturated the area with shot and explosive M-79 rounds and automatic-weapons fire. After a brief firefight with other unseen enemy just 25 meters away on the hill, the ambush ended. A quick survey of the small battlefield revealed one VC pointman, dead, and two slightly wounded American soldiers.

Sullivan ordered the remaining Claymores blown, lest the enemy form along his perimeter for a counterattack, and returned to his basecamp just before midnight. A more thorough search of the area the following morning disclosed a second body, an American submachine gun and amunition, an M-14 bayonet, and enough bloodied clothing to indicate that at least two more VC probably had been killed. This episode, reported in Colonel John A. Cash's *Seven Firefights in Vietnam*, clearly demonstrates the Claymore's ability as an antipersonnel weapon.

Used widely in the jungles, mountains and rice paddies of Vietnam, the Claymore quickly attracted more than passing attention from the Viet Cong, North Vietnam, China and the Soviet Union. Not counting commonly used non-directional, antipersonnel grenades and mines (the Viet Cong Bamboo mines, knee mines, and stick mines, the North Korean NKPA Shrapnel Mine, the Soviet POMZ-2, and the CHICOM POMZ-2M), no fewer than 19 foreign-made, Claymore-type antipersonnel mines eventually were identified in Southeast Asia. These included a wide variety of circular, disk-shaped, directional devices: the NVA MDH-7 (3.8 kg); the small, shotgun-like VC DH3 and DH5; the VC and Soviet MDH-5 (886 grams) with its 482 steel pellets and familiar warning, "MAT MAY HUONG VE FIA DICH (Point this side toward enemy); the VC DH-10 series (starting at 9 kg); and the VC's homemade MDH series of 4K, 6K, 8K, 10K mines that varied in weight from 8 to 16 kilograms.

On a more primitive level, the Communist insurgents also produced a wide variety of directional mines that copied the Claymore's distinctive rectangular shape. These clones included the Viet Cong's Improvised Claymore (Fragmentation), a rectangular box, usually about 4"x6"x18", filled with shaped plastic explosive (if available) and assorted nuts, bolts, nails, glass, or used machine-gun links; the VC MDH C-40, a sheet metal Claymore-copy that weighed up to 3.4 kg; and the VC MDH-2 series "Claymore," a refined version of the C-40 that used a concave shape to control its fragmentation pattern.

Perhaps the most interesting enemy variation on the Claymore was the VC Flying MDH Mine. Used as a com-

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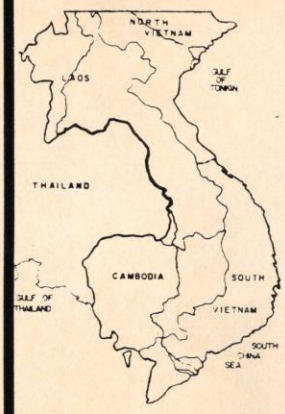

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mand-detonated anti-helicopter weapon, the Flying Mine was actually two large, dish-shaped MDH bound together with wire and separated by bamboo stakes and a canvas bag filled with dirt. The entire assembly was then placed in a small hole and aimed upward above a likely American landing zone. When the bottom mine was detonated, the explosion threw the second mine, cushioned by the bag of dirt, about 70 feet into the air. Throwing the mine skyward also ignited friction fuses attached to the device and, four seconds later, it detonated. The resulting air burst could prove deadly to any helicopter unlucky enough to be within its frag range.

Today, the M18A1 Claymore remains a standard weapon in the American arsenal for perimeter defense and for use in offensive ambuscades. In fact, its success on the modern battlefield has been so profound as to prompt other nations—Allied, neutral, and Soviet-bloc—to produce identical or closely related Claymore-type mines and devices for themselves. Austria produces the ARGES M80, DNW HM 1000, SMI series, and APM-1 and 2; Sweden makes the concave FFV 013 copy; France manufactures a remote-activated Maped F1 copy; Chile has its Cardeon, another close copy of the Claymore; South Africa produces an exact copy, the Shrapnel Mine No. 2; and South Korea currently makes the M18A1 Claymore under license. Within the Soviet bloc, Yugoslavia makes a rectangular MRUD Claymore-styled antipersonnel mine, and the Soviet Union, while avoiding the familiar Claymore shape, nevertheless produces two large directional and disk-shaped antipersonnel weapons based on the same principle—the 11-pound, 270mm diameter MON-100 and the behemoth, 55-pound, 550mm diameter, MON-200 that contains 26 pounds of high explosive.

The Claymore's wide acceptance and frequent imitation indicates both the impact and success of this weapon. But one must also be impressed by its long and faithful service. While other weapons have come and gone, the M18A1 Claymore has endured, retaining the same basic design features as did the original Claymore mine some 35 years ago. Although the U.S. Army issued its last production contract for new M18A1s in 1973, fresh investigations are underway today to improve its ability to withstand extremes of heat and humidity. This means the not-too-distant future may see the birth of still another refined Claymore, a lethal new weapon expected to be called the M18A2. □

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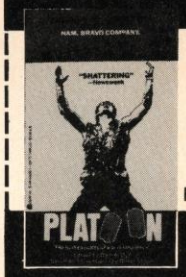

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The Wall *is moving testimonial to a moving war memorial that records a sad postscript of artifacts.*

By Blaine Taylor

"During the past five years," says Collins Publishers spokesperson Patti Richards, "over eight million people have visited the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. They have come to remember the 58,132 Americans who were killed or listed as missing in action during the Vietnam War. It is a powerful place, an angle of black granite wedged into a gentle lawn, where a nation comes to grieve its loss and find peace among the memories of war . . .

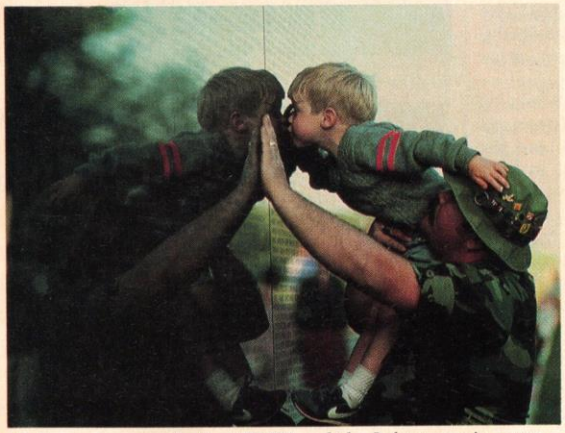
"Over 4,900 letters and artifacts have been left at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to date." In *The Wall: Images and offerings from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Sal Lopes, project director; Collins; 1987; $24.95), the selections from those heartfelt messages are both many and terribly moving:

"I remember your elation on the night we graduated from high school together in 1960."

"You gave your life for all of us. Now I'm just a middle-aged woman working daily with people whose dreams have been shattered by life."

"I'm bringing Teddy Bear and a picture of your loved race car. I realize they can't stay there long but they are yours and I want them to be with you."

"You were the only young man from our town to die in the Vietnam War, and not the best boy the town produced—more like a hoodlum most of the time, but you did not shirk your duty, nor did you take the easy 'route' to Canada. As a result, you made the ultimate sacrifice. You might not have cared about your little hometown, but, in your way, you helped to keep it free. There is no monument to record your sacrifice, nor is your name read out on Memorial Day. Some of us think of you once in a while, though. Whenever I'm home from the Army, I visit your gravesite. From all of us, thanks."



At first controversial, the "Wall" and the Infantrymen's statue of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., have become touchstones for Vietnam veterans and their families.

"You and I were not friends while you were alive, but then we were only kids. I came today to honor your sacrifice. I came for Kathy and your parents, but also for the man you would have grown to be. A man I would have liked. The kid I remember probably wouldn't have cared much for these flowers from my garden, but the man you could have been would appreciate them. The Indian Blanket and Purple Sage are native to Texas and there are sprigs of Thyme, Melissa and Fennel native to your father's homeland."

One of the most touching is from an unknown mother to her dead son:

"Dear Bill,

"Today, I come to this memorial, this black wall. I come to put flowers and a letter, not because it's special day, like your birthday or Memorial Day. But just because it's Tuesday, and just because I love and miss you so and want the whole world to know . . .

"Yes, I remember that you lived. I remember our laughter together and our tears when your rabbits died and especially when your grandparents died. I remember when you would get mad at me because you had to the dishes or carry out the trash or be in bed a certain time on school nights.

"But I can't forget that you died. I will never forget the day that I heard of your death. I will never forget the long days of waiting for your body to be returned from Vietnam. I will never forget the millions of tears I have shed. And I can't forget the terrible hurt because you are not with me and never will be again.

"I have cried many, many tears since you left us because I saw no reason for you to die and I see no reason now . . ."

But how did the nation's official Vietnam Veterans Memorial come into being?

According to Patti Richards: "In early 1979, Jan C. Scruggs, a 29-year-old former infantryman who saw combat in Vietnam, decided he was going to build a memorial to all the Americans who had served in the Vietnam War. Scruggs left his job, incorporated the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) as a nonprofit organization, and began talking to whomever would listen.

"The VVMF quickly established a timetable: the memorial would be dedicated on Veterans Day, 1982. They wanted a nonpolitical memorial, a place to honor those who had served and those who had died. They would raise the funds through private donations. All they asked from the government was a suitable place to put the memorial in Washington, D.C.

"Scruggs' committee won congressional support for a bill setting aside two acres of land near the Lincoln Memorial, and began a national fund-raising effort. In the end, the VVMF would raise over $8 million, from over 650,000 separate contributions.

"Messages accompanied many of the offerings. From the 87-year-old grandmother of a Marine who lost both legs in Vietnam: 'I did not expect

Continued on page 62

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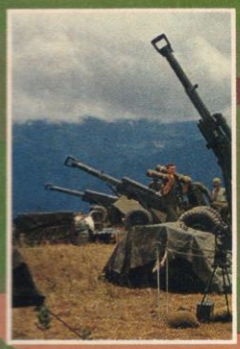

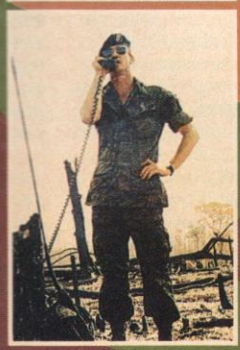

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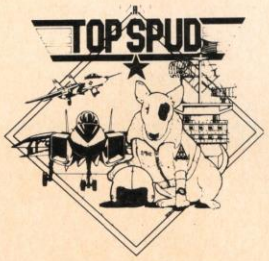

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□PERSONALITY□

Continued from page 8

ments of the 1st Battalion, Alpha Company had been ordered to relieve another American unit trapped on the low mountain slopes. Marm was in charge of his company's 2nd Platoon.

Soon, the platoon was slogging forward through waist-high elephant grass. But fierce enemy fire forced the Americans to pull back and regroup early in the afternoon. Already, Marm's marksmanship had accounted for at least four enemy dead. Then, at 4:30, the Cavalrymen set out again.

This time, they pushed forward for more than 200 yards despite the heavy small-arms fire directed at them. But two or more machine guns concealed behind a giant anthill stopped the advance cold. Return fire failed to pierce the tall mound's hard surface. Grenades simply bounced off and exploded harmlessly.

The Cavalrymen either had to turn back or to neutralize the bunker-like position. Marm grabbed a Light Antitank Weapon (LAW), a modern "throw-away" version of the old bazooka, knelt down and steadied the rocket-firing device on his shoulder. Some of those watching thought he deliberately exposed himself to pinpoint the source of the raking fire.

At any rate, he was in full view of the enemy gunners for at least 30 seconds as he took aim with the one-round LAW. In moments, its missile dug into the bunker's base with a tart explosion.

"It seemed like they slowed up," he would recall later. But he and his men had barely gone another 15 yards before they heard the lethal chatter of a machine gun once more. And now they were far more exposed than before. Something had to be done, and quickly. Marm shouted orders at his nearest men to hurl their grenades, but in the din of gunfire, they couldn't hear him. "I couldn't waste any more time," he said later. "I just went forward myself."

Survivors of the firefight later were to describe their lieutenant's next actions as "super-human." Signalling his men to hold their fire so he wouldn't be shot in the back, Marm plunged crazily through the high grass toward the big anthill 30 yards away. "Whether or not anybody shot at me, I don't know. It just seemed pretty quiet, because our lines weren't firing. I didn't notice any hits or ricochets close to me . . ."

In seconds, Marm had covered the intervening stretch. He crouched at the base of the anthill, out of the line of fire from the bunker behind, but still an open target for North Vietnamese among trees to the side. Nearly deafened by the noise of nearby automatic weaponry, he pulled desperately at the pin on a grenade. "I did what I planned—I just dropped the grenade over the top."

Now, Marm had to wait for five, foot-dragging seconds for the detonation. "It seemed like an awful long time—I was expecting it to come back over at me any moment."

Finally, the grenade went off. Marm leaped to his feet, rushed around the high mound and jumped into the enemy bunker with his M-16 at hip level. He saw a man behind a machine gun and shot him. How many others he shot he couldn't recall. "They said the count was 18 altogether. I don't think I could take credit for all of them, there were so many of us firing."

Be that as it may, Marm's action earned him the Medal of Honor, only the seventh one awarded so far (239 were ultimately awarded) in the Vietnam conflict. His company commander, Captain Ramon A. Nadal, put in the recommendation and later commented, "He's a fantastic man." And as the official citation says, "Lieutenant Marm's selfless actions reduced the fire on his platoon, broke the enemy assault and rallied his unit to continue toward the accomplishment of their mission."

The mission, however, continued without Joe Marm. As he recalls, he turned on the lip of the Communist bunker to wave his men forward when a sniper's bullet smashed into his lower jaw. But here, eye-witnesses disagreed. They reported their leader was wounded during his assault and only felt the injury afterwards. Marm says, "I lost all my momentum the moment I was hit."

Regardless of the actual sequence, he now dropped his rifle and sank down in a daze. Enemy fire from the scrub oaks nearby still was so intense that the first two Americans trying to reach him were cut down themselves. Eventually, however, the enemy was driven back; Marm and the other wounded were evacuated by helicopter. By the next day, the Cavalrymen encircled farther up the mountain slopes had been reached and relieved.

In five days, Joe Marm was at an Army hospital in Valley Forge, Penna., not far from his home. He spent Christmas of 1965 with his family in Washington, Penna., though his jaw remained wired shut and his diet consisted of baby foods.

After three months' convalescence, he returned to duty, this time as an instructor at the Army's Stateside

Wary of ambush, a patrol moves out. Such scenarios stuck with Marm, who went back to Vietnam in hopes that he "might be able to save some lives."

Mountain Ranger Camp. In December 1966, Marm was called to Washington, D.C. There, with 17 members of his proud family in attendance, he accepted his Medal of Honor from Army Secretary Stanley Resor on the Pentagon Mall.

The now-distant war in Vietnam may have become politically controversial in the Sixties, but the matter-of-fact hero from Pennsylvania suddenly found himself to be a celebrity in wide demand anyway. Television talk-shows sought him out. Atlanta, Ga., made him grand marshal of its annual July Fourth Parade. Pennsylvania's legislature voted him a certificate of appreciation. He was a guest at White House receptions.

He soon was appointed aide-de-camp to Lieut. Gen. Harry W.O. Kinnard, head of the Army's Combat Development Command at Ft. Belvoir, Va. Appropriately, it had been Kinnard who commanded the 1st Cav during its formative period and its first year in Vietnam—including the victorious Ia Drang campaign.

Despite the attention he received, associates noted, Marm remained markedly modest, even humble. When the clean-cut young bachelor went out on dates, the young women he escorted often never learned of his exclusive award for heroism. If they asked about the small pin in the lapel of his civilian jacket, he simply would say it was a "rosette." But he admitted: "If they ask what it stands for, then I tell them.

Meanwhile, Joe Marm found a new way of serving his country—as a speaker for the Treasury Department's Savings Bonds campaigns, and as an Army representative sent to high school and other youthful audiences.

If his jaw remained a bit stiff, audiences taken by the young man's sincerity and infectious smile seemed not to care. "He's the greatest guy in the world," said a Savings Bond official who toured several eastern states with the war hero. "I just can't say too much for him." On one such tour, the same source noted, Marm met the governors of several states, addressed business leaders and brought members of South Carolina's legislature to their feet in a standing ovation.

"He spoke plainly; he was very articulate," said the Treasury spokesman. "He made a tremendous impression on everybody he met." Likewise, Pentagon officials who helped to arrange Marm's appearances, many of them in response to unsolicited invitations, described the young officer as close to "the ideal young American."

Despite all the attention and hoopla, Joe Marm still was a competitive young man—he found outlet now in Formula-V auto-racing at speeds up to 115 miles per hour.

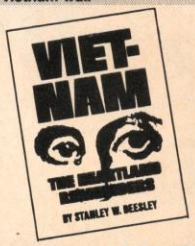
But he still chafed for action after two years or more at his desk-bound job. "If I'm going to stay in [the Army]," he decided in 1968, "I want to pull my share of the hardship chores."

His wound in the Ia Drang campaign, of course, had cut short his anticipated combat tour in Vietnam. And now it again was characteristic of Joe Marm to volunteer to go back, apparently as the first Medal of Honor winner from Vietnam to gain Army approval for a second combat tour.

"To be a professional soldier, I want to be over there getting this experience," he explained at the time. "You can't get it anywhere else." He paused, then added—with that "selfless" attitude noted in his citation: "Besides, I might be able to save some lives with my own knowledge and get the war over with just a little bit sooner." □

VIETNAM

"Now I got four men instantly dead, seven others dying they're hurt so bad. I'm wounded. I can't hear. I'm yelling into the radio for medevacs and I don't even know if they're on. I just yelled into the phone, 'TL one-three is down. WIA. Four KIA. Seven WIA, critical.' There is no one left standing but me." — Billy Waikabout, Ranger Team Leader, 101st Airborne Division, the most decorated soldier of the Vietnam war.



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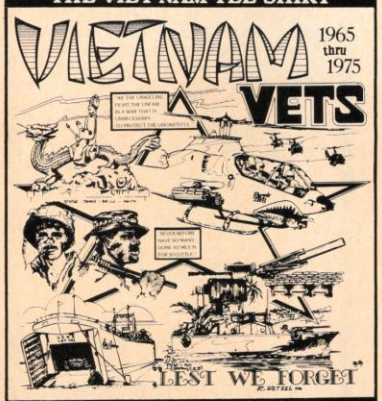

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□BOOK REVIEWS□

Continued from page 58

a ticker-tape parade when I returned when I returned to the States, but I have served my country faithfully. For the war I hated and the friends I loved and lost. Let us never forget the waste of war.'

"In the Fall of 1980, the VVMF selected a jury of architects and sculptors to hold a design competition for the memorial, which the general public was invited to enter. They announced their surprising decision the following spring. Out of the 1,421 entries that had been submitted, they had chosen a remarkably simple design—two granite walls inthe shape of a V, inscribed with the names of the dead.

"The architect, Maya Ying Lin, was a 21-year-old Asian-American student at Yale. 'I felt a memorial should be honest about the reality of war and be for the people who gave their lives . . .' Maya Lin commented. 'I had no impulse to cut open the earth . . . an initial violence that in time would heal . . . The names would become the memorial. There was no need to embellish.'

"With few exceptions, press reaction and congressional response to the design were positive, even ecstatic, but Scruggs and his organization were nervous. What would the vets think?

"Tom Carhart, a veteran who had entered the design competition, spoke up angrily, calling Maya Lin's design a "black gash of shame," a phrase that became a rallying call for the design's vocal—if small—opposition. The new Secretary of the Interior, Reagan-appointee James Watt, had final jurisdiction over the memorial. He actively opposed the design and threatened to withhold the necessary permits for its construction.

"After months of bureaucratic haggling, a compromise was reached whereby a conventional bronze grouping of three infantrymen—one white, one black, one Hispanic—and a flagpole were placed off to the side of Maya Lin's simple design.

"On Friday, March 26, 1982, ground was broken on the Mall at Constitution Gardens for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. A Navy pilot, visiting the site, produced a Purple Heart medal that had been awarded posthumously to his brother. He asked that it be embedded in the Wall's concrete foundations, just then being poured. The uniformed flyer saluted as the workmen carried out his request.

"On Veteran's Day, November 13, 1982, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was officially dedicated. The VVMF organized a massive salute to the vets which brought over 150,000 veterans and their friends and families into Washington, D.C. A 62-hour vigil was held at the National Cathedral, where volunteers read the names of the dead amid prayers and tears. A veterans' parade down Constitution Avenue preceded the short, dignified dedication. America's Vietnam veterans were finally being welcomed home . . ."

In all, 58,132 names were etched chronologically, in the order of their deaths, onto the two walls of the Memorial, one pointing to the Washington Monument and the other toward the Lincoln Memorial. They rise to a height of 10.1 feet at their vertex. Each wall has 70 panels cut from black granite—the panels are polished, and their mica content causes a mirroring effect that reflects the sky and the ground and those who come to stand in front of the Wall.

The Marines of "Semper Fi" in Vietnam, 1965-73; by Brig. Gen. Edwin H. Simmons; 1987; $6.95.

It began undramatically as an unopposed beach landing in a tiny Southeast Asian nation on March 8, 1965, as the 9th U.S. Marine Expeditionary Brigade put in at Da Nang.

In two earlier wars, the Marines had stormed ashore under intense enemy fire at places such as Tarawa, Iwo Jima or Inchon, but here—in South Vietnam—instead of hostile forces, the fully-armed Marines found smiling college girls. It was an inauspicious, almost comic way to inaugurate one of the most bloody chapters in the entire history of the men (and women) of *Semper Fi* ("Always Faithful," the Marine Corps motto).

It was also misleading—before they left for good eight years later, in 1973, the Marines would see blood and death on new battlegrounds, in the streets and pagodas of the ancient Imperial city of Hue, atop a lonely mountain fortress called Khe Sanh, and in many other places.

The book detailing this story appears as one of the first volumes of Bantam's projected series, *The Illustrated History of the Vietnam War*. The current volume is by Brig. Gen. Edwin H. Simmons, USMC, who served two Vietnam tours of duty, the first as an operations officer of the III Marine Amphibious Force and commanding officer of the 9th Marine Regiment, and later as Assistant Division Commander of the 1st Marine Division

Two Marines help a wounded buddy to an evacuation chopper on Van Tuong Peninsula in August 1965.

and Deputy Commander of the 3rd Marine Amphibious Brigade. The author of many books and magazine articles, Marine Corps historian Simmons probably is best known for his detailed study, *The United States Marine Corps, 1775-1975*.

He is, as can be expected, somewhat biased toward the Corps in Vietnam—particularly in its relationship with the U.S. Army there, and especially with the overall theater commander, a four-star Army general whose name became, for many Americans, synonymous with the war itself: William Childs Westmoreland.

Indeed, the private disagreements between "Westy" and the Corps' Maj. Gen. Lewis W. Walt form one of the book's many more interesting highlights. But the author, to his credit, doesn't shirk from airing other controversies as well—such as the effectiveness in combat of the still-debated M-16 rifle (which replaced the standard M-14 in 1966.)

His detailed study discusses other wartime weaponry as well: Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara's much-ridiculed "Electronic Wall;" the Bell Huey helicopter; the M-72 LAW anti-tank rocket launcher; the 4.2-inch heavy mortar and 60mm mortar; the Huey Cobra; the M-60 machine gun (still used today); the 175mm mounted gun; and the M-48 tank.

All aspects of Marine involvement in the war are explored at length—the story is told, "warts and all."

Illustrated with 10 color and more than 100 black and white photos—plus dozens of maps and line drawings—this volume sets a high standard for the others in the Bantam series: *Armor*, *Sky Soldiers*, *Carrier Operations*, *Khe Sanh*, *Tunnel Warfare*, *Artillery* and *Riverine Force*.

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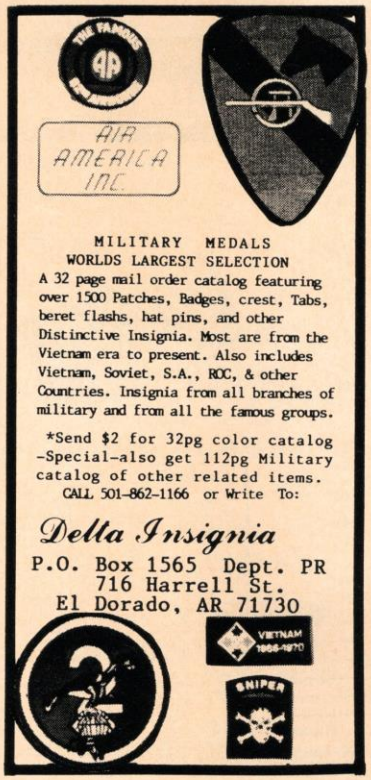


□FORCES□

Continued from page 10

130s were rigged for airdrop of containers and their crews briefed for possible airdrops into the camp. In the meantime, the Communist attackers captured all outposts in the hills and drew a tight circle around Kham Duc.

Crewmembers assigned to the C-130s and C-123s in Vietnam had no idea of the evacuation when they reported for duty that morning, but they quickly "pre-flighted" their aircraft and departed for jump-off destinations placing them in position to go into the camp to bring out the defenders.

During the morning hours a few Army and Marine helicopters managed to get in and out of Kham Duc while bringing out a few survivors. One of the Chinooks, which had fallen earlier in the day, blocked the runway, so that fixed-wing landings were impossible. At around 1:00 p.m., the wreckage was removed—soon afterwards, a C-130A flown by a crew from the 35th Tactical Airlift Squadron, based at Naha Air Base, Okinawa, but operating from Cam Rhan Bay, landed to pick up evacuees. The airplane was immediately besieged by civilian dependents of the Vietnamese forces and its cargo compartment was quickly filled to capacity.

As the pilot, Lieut. Col. Daryl D. Cole, began his take-off roll, a barrage of mortar rounds bracketed the airplane, with shrapnel flattening a tire. Colonel Cole aborted the take-off and his crew off-loaded the passengers, then began cutting away the remains of the shredded tire.

While they were on the ground, working feverishly to remove the tire fragments, a C-123 flown by Major Ray D. Shelton landed safely and loaded passengers. In spite of automatic-weapons fire and about a dozen mortar rounds landing nearby, Major Shelton and his crew managed to get their airplane off the ground.

Around noon Colonel Cole's crew took off from Kham Duc in an airplane with only three main-gear tires and with fuel streaming from holes in the wings. The only passengers now aboard the unsafe aircraft were three members of an Air Force combat control team, whose radio equipment had been destroyed by enemy fire, and who were now unable to perform their duties of providing traffic and field information to arriving aircraft. For the feat, Cole and his crew would receive the MacKay Trophy for "the most meritorious flight of the year" by Air Force aircraft.

Other C-130s were now overhead of the besieged camp, but temporarily were prevented from landing. At 12:30 a C-130 crew broke off their approach due to the intensity of enemy fire. By mid-afternoon, only 145 persons had been brought out of the camp by the 15 helicopters and one C-123 that had managed to remove personnel. In the sky near the camp more than a dozen C-130s and C-123s were orbiting and awaiting instructions to land, along with a command and control C-130 and another C-130 with General McLaughlin aboard.

At 3:25, the C-130 landings resumed. The first airplane to try was a C-130B from the 463rd Tactical Airlift Wing, based in the Philippines. After making a steep approach from the south, the pilot, Major Bernard L. Bucher, managed to land. But more than 100 persons, most of them civilian dependents of the Vietnamese at the camp—and all by this time panicky and disorganized—clambered aboard the airplane. Major Bucher either was unaware of the concentration of enemy forces to the north, or chose to ignore them, because he took off in that direction. As the airplane crossed over the northern boundary of the camp, enemy tracer-fire was observed converging on the airplane. Severely damaged, the C-130B turned slightly and tumbled out of control into a ravine. There were no survivors. Other Americans, who survived the ordeal of Kham Duc, reported that the Vietnamese troops were vastly demoralized, even hysterical, after watching their families die.

The next airplane into the camp was a C-130E flown by Lieut. Col. William Boyd, Jr. After making a go-around due to intense small-arms fire, Boyd landed on his second attempt. Loading 100 aboard, most of them also Vietnamese, Boyd made his take-off to the south. He had observed the previous tragedy and was aware of the enemy forces to the north.

After lift-off, he banked the airplane and remained low, just above the ground, so that the terrain would mask his airplane from the enemy. Despite several hits by ground fire, and resulting dense smoke in the interior of the airplane, he safely reached Chu Lia. Colonel Boyd was later decorated with the Air Force Cross in recognition of his exploit. (Major Bucher was posthumously awarded the Air Force Cross, as well.)

Behind Colonel Boyd came another C-130A from the Naha-based 21st Tactical Airlift Squadron. Lieutenant Colonel John R. Delmore made his

approach by spiraling down from directly overhead, but as he rolled out for the landing, enemy bullets began striking the airplane. In an interview with Air Force historian Colonel Ray Bowers, flight engineer TSgt. John K. McCall said the sound of incoming rounds hitting their airplane was "like sledgehammers." Smoke began curling upward through the cockpit floor, while bullet holes began appearing in the roof, the rounds ripping through

An Army trooper stands—at the ready—watching supplies floating down.

the cockpit "like a can opener." The enemy fire destroyed all hydraulics, thus rendering the hydraulics-boosted controls on the big Hercules unuseable. Almost completely out of control, the stricken ship struck the ground, then skidded to a halt just off the edge of the runway, with the nose of the airplane partially buried in the earth. The five-man crew scrambled out, now themselves among the stranded defenders of Kham Duc. American soldiers guided the five men to shelter, then placed them aboard a Marine helicopter which managed to penetrate the wall of fire around Kham Duc.

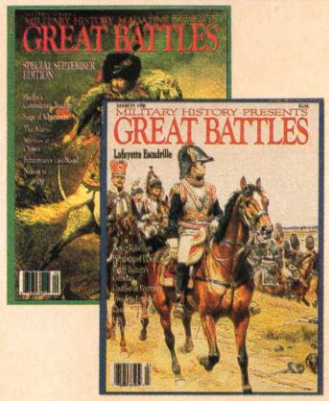
Although the airlifters orbiting nearby had seen the carnage of the two C-130 crashes, they persisted in their efforts. In a short period just after 4:00 p.m., three C-130s managed to get in and out of Kham Duc, carrying full loads of personnel with them. One was an A-model flown by Lieut. Col. Franklin B. Montgomery, another was a B-model flown by Major Norman K. Jensen and the last was an E-model flown by Lieut. Col. James L. Wallace. During Wallace's approach, he was aware of enemy tracers being directed at his aircraft, but chose to ignore them while concentrating on the landing. He came over the runway at a perpendicular angle and made a 270-degree turn with power fully retarded, gear and flaps down. As soon as he was on the ground, he reversed all four engines and stood on the brakes to stop in as short a distance as possible. More than 100 Vietnamese scrambled aboard, all of whom were in a panic-stricken condition. One woman and her baby were almost trampled in the rush, and Wallace's loadmaster had to rescue them to prevent their being overrun. About a dozen Americans also were part of his load.

As the C-130s landed at Kham Duc, Marine and Army helicopter crews took advantage of the covering fire laid down by Air Force fighters and helicopter gunships to make their own pickups. Throughout the evacuation, Captain Phillip B. Smotherman, who had been shot down in his O-2 Skymaster forward-aircontroller aircraft, remained on his radios directing air strikes and providing a link between the C-130 command and control ship circling overhead and an Army control helicopter, also overhead, with the helicopters, fighters and transports that were involved in the rescue. He was evacuated on one of the last C-130s.

Colonel Wallace took off to the south, as did the other C-130s, while the shelling and enemy fire continued. Although the various control elements in the vicinity of Kham Duc did not yet know it, those last three C-130s had withdrawn the last of the defenders.

After Kham Duc had been evacuated, although without the knowledge of the command and control elements, a decision was made which came very close to resulting in added tragedy. A C-130 flown by crewmen from Tactical Air Command who had been sent on temporary duty to the Pacific in response to the Tet Offensive and commanded by Lieut. Col. Jay Van Cleef, prepared to land at Kham Duc to pick-up evacuees. Aboard Van Cleef's airplane were the same three Air Force combat controllers who had flown out of Kham Duc on Colonel Cole's airplane earlier in the day. In spite of Van Cleef's protests that the camp was almost completely evacuated, "Hilda," the 834th Air Division command center at Tan Son Nhut, mistakenly ordered that the three men be left at Kham Duc.

In obedience to orders, Van Cleef landed at the camp, after everyone had been taken out. The three combat controllers left the relative security of the airplane and ran toward the camp, by this time burning and exploding as fires set by the defenders did their work. Van Cleef waited for two minutes, with his engines running, and when no evacuees appeared, he shoved the power-levers forward and took his "Herky-bird" out of Kham Duc. He notified the command ship overhead that he had taken off empty and heard the controller report to General McLaughlin that the evacuation was complete. But Kham Duc was *not* evac-



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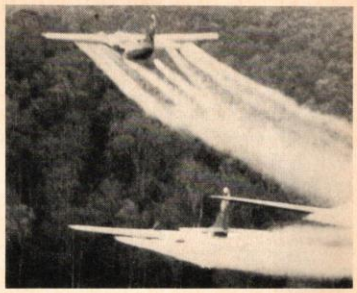
uated—the last Hercules had just left three American combat controllers on the ground. For a moment there was stunned silence on all the radios as the reality of the situation was digested by all: the camp was now in enemy hands but three American combat controllers were still on the ground

At this point no one had any idea of their fate. They could be evading capture, or they could have already been taken prisoner, or killed. However, combat controllers have a reputation for being tough and resourceful—on a par with any special operations soldiers. Trained as radiomen, the combat controller is also a parachutist, a scuba-diver, and a specialist in hand-to-hand combat. His job is to set up drop zones for air assaults and to provide control of Air Force transports operating into forward airfields in the absence of Army or Marine air traffic controllers. At the time, the combat controllers were easily identified by their blue berets, a distinctive symbol which set them apart from the rest of the Air Force.

As it turns out, after leaving Van Cleef's airplane, the three men, led by Major John W. Gallagher, Jr., had run through the camp and taken shelter in a culvert next to the runway. Seeing Communist troops in the area, they engaged them with their M-16s. A C-123 then landed from the south, under fire from all directions, but took off again after the pilot, Lieut. Col. Alfred J. Jeannotte, Jr., and his crew were unable to spot the stranded men. Shortly after taking off, his crew did see the three men in the culvert, but due to low fuel he dared not attempt another landing. Even so, his efforts earned an Air Force Cross.

A few minutes later another rescue ship landed. The pilot of this C-123 was Lieut. Col. Joe M. Jackson, who had been receiving a Standardizations Evaluation check ride from Major Jesse W. Campbell, who was in the co-pilot's seat.

They came over what was now an inferno of exploding ammunition at 8,000 feet and side-slipped down with power off, full flaps and gear down, dropping like the proverbial rock. As the airplane touched down, the three combat controllers made a run for it. Jackson brought his airplane to a stop beside them, his loadmaster opened a door for them, then once they tumbled aboard, Jackson wheeled the C-123 around and took off again to the south. The entire time they were on the ground they were under fire from Communist troops using the wreck of Colonel Delmore's "Herk" for shelter. As the airplane lifted off, one of



Another usage of the versatile U.S. Air Force C-123 is seen here as three aircraft spray defoliation chemicals.

the rescued combat controllers observed: "We were dead, and all of a sudden we were alive."

General McLaughlin had observed the rescue from above and approved subsequent nominations for the Congressional Medal of Honor for both pilots. Jackson received the Medal at the White House in 1969, but co-pilot Campbell's recommendation was downgraded to an Air Force Cross. The enlisted crew members were awarded Silver Stars.

Even after the heroic efforts of Jackson and his crew, "Hilda" almost did it again. The airlift center sent still another C-130 to land and discharge another combat control team "to search the camp for survivors." Even though the Hercules crew had witnessed Jackson's landing, they were preparing to do as told when the order was rescinded—just as they were about to touch down.

After everyone was out of the camp, air strikes destroyed the remains. Helicopters continued to pick up survivors who had been in the outposts in the hills for the next several days. Although as many as 1,800 military personnel—both American and Vietnamese—and civilians were in the camp, only 259 were lost. Half of those were in the one C-130 which was shot down on take-off. Twenty-five men of the U.S. Army were lost. Two Army Chinooks, two Marine CH-46s and two Air Force C-130s were destroyed, along with one O-2 FAC (Forward Air Control) aircraft. The Air Force transports brought out more than 500 persons, nearly all in the last few minutes prior to the overrunning of the camp by the enemy.

Kham Duc was not a major battle and has received little publicity. Yet that one afternoon, May 12, 1968, was the occasion for an exhibition of courage, skill, selflessness and dedication by the crews of Army and Marine helicopters and those airmen you rarely hear about, the USAF transport crews. □

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'The Grunt'

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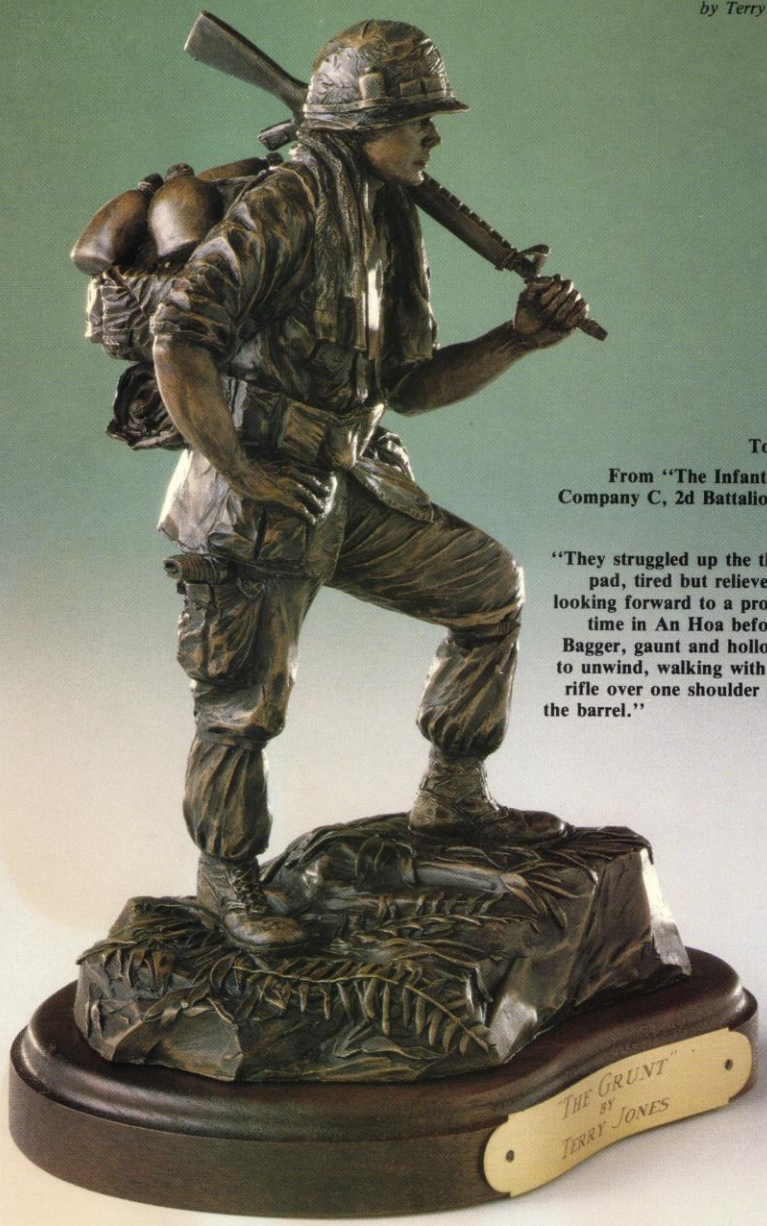

**"I am an Infantryman . . .
A Grunt,
To so many is the name . . ."**

From "The Infantryman's Plead," folk poem, Company C, 2d Battalion, 28th Infantry, Viet Nam.

"They struggled up the thin road from the helicopter pad, tired but relieved, electric with anticipation, looking forward to a promised four days turnaround time in An Hoa before they beat the bush again. Bagger, gaunt and hollow-eyed, but already starting to unwind, walking with his sturdy yawing steps, his rifle over one shoulder like a tramp's stick, held by the barrel."

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